

DARK HOUSES: NAVIGATING SPACE AND NEGOTIATING SILENCE IN
THE NOVELS OF FAULKNER, WARREN AND MORRISON

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Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," as early as 1839, reveals an uneasiness about the space of the house. Most literary scholars accept that this anxiety exists and causes some tension, since it seems antithetical to another dominant motif, that of the power of place and the home as sanctuary. My critical persona, like Poe's narrator in "The House of Usher," looks into a dark, silent tarn and shudders to see in it not only the reflection of the House of Usher, but perhaps the whole of what is "Southern" in Southern Literature.

Many characters who inhabit the worlds of Southern stories also inhabit houses that, like the House of Usher, are built on the faulty foundation of an ideological system that divides the world into inside(r)/outside(r) and along numerous other binary lines. The task of constructing the self in spaces that house such ideologies poses a challenge to the characters in the works under consideration in this study, and their success in doing so is dependant on their ability to speak authentically in the language of silence and to *dwell* instead of to just inhabit interior spaces.

In my reading of Faulkner and Warren, this ideology of division is clearly to be at fault in the collapse of houses, just as it is seen to be in the House of Usher. This emphasis is especially conspicuous in several works, beginning with Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and its (pre)text, "Evangeline." Warren carries the motif forward in his late novels, *Flood* and *Meet Me in the Green Glen*. I examine these works relative to

spatial analysis and an aesthetic of absence, including an interpretation of silence as a mode of *authentic saying*. I then discuss these motifs as they are operating in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and finally take *Song of Solomon* as both an end and a beginning to these texts' concerns with collapsing structures of narrative and house.

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INTRODUCTION

Poe's "House of Usher," as early as 1839, reveals an uneasiness about the space of the house. That anxiety is echoed in 1851 by Melville, whose crew in *Moby Dick* sails ever onward in search of the white whale, avoiding the confines of the city and the buildings depicted in such claustrophobic and life-draining terms in both "Bartleby" and "Billy Budd." By 1884, we see Huck Finn heroically "light out for the territory" rather than submit to the emasculating containment of the Widow Douglass' house and the civilizing aspect it represents. Dreiser, Crane, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and even Fitzgerald depict interiors and the space of the house as cloying and dark, an impoverished space, or as threatening to masculinity and the spirit of adventure, hopelessly confining or cluttered with symbols of superficiality and meaninglessness.

So, though the settling of the frontier captured the American imagination and in many ways still shapes the character of the American novel, settling down is often depicted as the worst fate that could befall a man, and

the heroic representation of nomadic life and certain forms of homelessness in our fiction can thus be seen as a powerful counterforce to images of settlement and home....The equation of civilization with loss of innocence, corruption, effeminacy and diminishment runs like a bass note through our literature. Very quickly the house we build around ourselves become prisons. (Chandler 4, 12)

Writers of the Southern Renaissance and the Nashville Agrarians reintroduced to literature the importance of place, of the land and ownership of it.¹ But even in their work, it is the public space of the outside, the land on which the house is built, the fields that surround it, the hamlets and towns of which these houses are a part, that is desirable. The house itself is only an object, one which should be observed from the outside and which is representative of the power of the man who built it, who, like Thomas Sutpen of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, "tore violently a plantation" from the earth and left it stand for him.

Just as Poe's narrator "at the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn...gazed down— ... with a shudder even more thrilling than before" upon the reflection of the House of Usher, so might we shudder to see this same house with its "bleak walls," "vacant, eye-like windows," "ghastly tree stems," and most importantly its "sense of insufferable gloom" reflected in the shadowy, miasmic realm of Thomas Sutpen, which "rises almost *ex nihilo* from the alluvial swamp."² And perhaps all Yoknapatawpha County, perhaps in the whole of what is "Southern" in Southern Literature there is also such a reflection, and Poe's story itself, a Southern one after all.³

Many characters who inhabit the worlds of Southern stories also inhabit houses like the House of Usher, which seems to me a prototype for architectural metaphor in American Literature, that are built on the faulty foundation of a patriarchal ordering system which objectifies, silences and entombs the other.⁴ In Usher, the silent objectified other is the feminine, represented by the ethereal and early-entombed Lady Madeline. For

Faulkner, Warren and Morrison otherness can be inscribed not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of race and class, and along several other dividing lines.

This system of binary oppositions has been constructed not according to a "separate but equal" world view, but according to a patriarchal worldview in which One term is privileged only at the expense of the Other. Since "...no subject will readily volunteer to become the object, the inessential...the Other must be posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One." ⁵ For a subject to be made object, the essential to be made inessential, the One must dominate the Other and rob it of its identity by imposing a static definition in place of that identity, thereby freezing and objectifying the Other, and thus "a free and autonomous being...nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other....to stabilize as object and doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego...which is essential and sovereign."⁶

The domination of the Other by the One is, as Marilyn Chandler says of the building of Sutpen's house, "at its very inception an act of violence and presumption" (Chandler 251), and both cases lead to building something which is "conceived and wrought in ambivalence, laid on a foundation of violence proportioned by guilt" (Chandler 258).

This is the flaw that destabilizes the foundation on which so many houses, as well as institutions, ideals and histories, are built. In Faulkner, this ideological foundation is clearly seen as being at fault in the collapse of houses, as it seen to be in the House of Usher, and in the failures of individuals, families and, by extension, the failure of the

South to overcome, to carry on, to rise again.⁷ As Chandler puts it, "Space is never neutral; it is filled with ideologies" (Chandler 12), and it is the ideology that fills these houses that eventually brings them down.

Many of the old Southern families and their houses in the works of Faulkner, Warren, and Morrison, as well as in works by numerous other authors, are on the verge of ruin and extinction when we meet them.⁸ Quentin imagines that the reason Rosa tells him Sutpen's story is so that he can write it down, and people will "know at last why God let us lose the War: that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and erase his name and lineage from the earth" (AA 11). In as much as Sutpen's story is the South's story, the demon in this passage, and for Quentin always, is not Sutpen himself, but the "design," through which Sutpen evolves an identity and to which he is inexorably linked. More than the design, even, the foundational ideology of division and difference on which that design is built, is shown to be replete with contradictions and hypocrisies. This is what Thomas Sutpen represents.

In Warren's novels, the patriarchs of the families we encounter in the textual present were men similar to Sutpen. Lank Tolliver of *Flood* bankrupts the Methodist church, the town of Fiddlersburg and the Fiddlers themselves, taking their house only to destroy its contents. In *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, we are told that the Spottwood house "was built by old Sunderland who had grabbed the land, built the house, beat the niggers and gone to Congress, and whose flat, painted arrogance of eye refused, in this dimness, to acknowledge what, over the years, had happened in his house" (MMGG 35).

For Toni Morrison, retelling the Southern story from a perspective never voiced in the works of Faulkner and Warren, the house takes on a different dimension. Haunted by the violence of these same men, both the house and the novel are "unable to contain the anguish of cultural displacement" (Bhabha 446). To express these inexpressible experiences, Morrison utilizes what Peter Walsh in his very influential book, *The Dark Matter of Words: Absence, Unknowing and Emptiness in Literature* terms "an aesthetic of absence."

Strangely, though, having experienced this aesthetic in Morrison's work, a complete *re-visioning* of Faulkner and Warren becomes possible.⁹ The voices in Morrison's fiction are not silenced in the works of these earlier male authors; in fact, they are clearly framed. Characters like Clytemnestra Sutpen of *Absalom, Absalom!* and Arlita of *Meet Me in the Green Glen* are not given a subjective narrative presence but their perspectives remain in the text as "structured absences," an important effect in the aesthetics of absence. The structured absence differs from a textual blank, and discussion of textual absence should be informed by a recognition of this difference. Walsh notes that

Most discussions of textual blanks tend to suggest that all narrative gaps are similar, that they are merely a lack, an empty space. A blank is a blank — it is nothing — and we tend to see nothing as equal to itself. Such a way of thinking, however, ignores the point that textual absence can only be perceived in terms of something present — that is, the parameters circumscribing the absence that combine to give any particular absence a characteristic "structure." (Walsh 116)

Each of the works under discussion here include notable absences, carefully framed by the authors in such a way as to make them a significant presence. In many of

Faulkner's texts, the narrative structure is sufficiently complex and full of holes, creating so many possibilities as to disallow any certainty on the part of the reader. This constitutes an *impacted structured absence*, defined as a narrative situation in which

we are left wondering some or all or perhaps none of the conjectures might be true. Each suggestion is plausible but not necessarily probable, so the reader is left with a sense of partial or veiled revelation, a disclosure so tenuous that the true state of affairs, we half suspect, may well have completely escaped apprehension. (Walsh 121)

Faulkner uses this form of structured absence to foreground the unreliability of language to create a viable (or even discernible) reality.

Likewise Warren, builds narratives in which the story is often parceled out among a variety of unreliable (though often not evidently so) narrative perspectives, and in which "the promotional surface narratives are constantly threatened by evidence of opposing views; that evidence constitutes a rival second story" (Chandler x). This is especially true in *Flood* where structured absences abound. But in *Meet Me in the Green Glen* Warren utilizes a complex and subtle form of structured absence termed *rarefied structured absence* by Peter Walsh:

Rarefied structured absences intrude more softly upon a reader's attention...Whereas impacted structured absences can provoke endless streams of speculation, rarefied structured absences seem emphatically mute and gnomic, often intimating that just beyond their blank surface there might lurk undisclosed depths of unspeakable significance. (Walsh 123).

The characters in *Meet Me in the Green Glen* are all "mute and gnomic," from the paralytic Sunder to the inarticulate Angelo Passetto; but of course the primary figure around whom the rarefied structured absences in the text circulate is Cassie Spottwood. Cassie's silence is brought on by a complex set of circumstances, all of which are a

critique of patriarchal values.

Both Faulkner and Warren stand among a list of American authors whose narrative structures and themes criticize patriarchal values and "patriarchal linguistic politics that tried to silence other views — otherness itself—in American culture, and their experiments with narrative form reflect their attempts to unmask the fraud perpetuated by their cultural fathers" (Chandler x), and perhaps even to frame the absence of the "second story."

The structured absences in these texts almost always surround the experiences of women and are bounded spatially as well as textually. The silences and absences in these texts circulate in the often invisible spaces inside the house, most often in the upstairs rooms. This creates an interesting connection to architecture, one noticed and expounded upon by Cynthia Jordan in her book, *Second Stories: The Politics of Language, Form and Gender in Early American Fictions*. She pinpoints Poe's House of Usher as the locus of the emergence of a "second story" in American fiction:

Starting with Roderick Usher, Poe began experiments with the androgynous male character whose developing empathy with a woman enables him to reject one-sided male-authored fictions and finally engender a new fictional form — a second story that provides a text for female experience. (Jordan 5)

The spaces that women occupy in the house, most often the invisible spaces of the closed off upstairs rooms where they can presumably be heard walking about, murmuring wordlessly in those "interior sounds a woman makes when she believes she is alone and unobserved" (*Beloved* 211).

Though absent from the view of the narrative presence that reports the events in

these texts, and silent in their spaces overhead, the women's presence is always felt by the men. Paul D. expresses a "conviction that he was being observed through the ceiling" (*Beloved* 203) and characters as diverse as Thomas Sutpen, Quentin Compson, Murray Guilfort, Angelo Passetto and Brad Tolliver express the desire to enter into the secret space of the upstairs. Each of these men senses the alignment of the women with the space of the upstairs, convinced that to enter this space is to enter the woman's mind or body. Brad Tolliver expresses this most clearly in his first visit to Leontine Purtle's home, when he "had that overmastering impulse. He had to see the inside of that house. He looked at Leontine and knew that he had to see the upstairs" (*Flood* 162), equating knowing Leontine with knowing the inside, specifically the upstairs. Angelo Passetto also braves the darkness at the head of the stairs in an effort to know Cassie Spottwood, and Paul D. recognizes that the space of the upstairs is "charmed," and that it excludes him somehow.

Only Milkman Dead encounters the second story in his narrative in a positive way. This is because Morrison, unlike Faulkner and Warren, is able to represent the voice that can speak the second story, the story of female experience and desires. The characters of Circe and Pilate together complete the narrative of black women's experience of the Southern story for Milkman. This enables him, as Jordan observes of Roderick Usher, to "go beyond the imaginative limits of the male storytellers...and recover the second story — the women's story — which has previously gone untold" (Jordan 5).

Women are clearly aligned with distinctive spaces and language practices in the

works of Faulkner, Warren and Morrison. This study is an exploration of the ways in which these three authors have appropriated the house as metaphor and constructed a complex relationship between gender, space and language. The houses in these novels reflect not only the psychological structure of the main characters or the social structures in which they are entrapped, but the structure of the text itself, setting up what Marilyn Chandler refers to as "a four-way and ultimately self-referential analogy among writer, text, character and house" (Chandler 3).

In addition, the houses under consideration here often act as characters themselves. They

... actually possess a sentience, a personality and character acquired not from the people who breathe or have breathed in them so much as inherent in the wood and brick or begotten upon the wood and brick by the man or men who conceived and built them — in this one an incontrovertible affirmation for emptiness, desertion; an insurmountable resistance to occupancy save when sanctioned and protected by the ruthless and the strong. (AA 67)

From the point of view of archetypal and phenomenological architecture, a house contains a spirit of place, a *genius loci*, and it is my argument that that spirit is a feminine one, essential to both House-as-family and house-as structure. I will be looking at these stories and the houses that figure so prominently in them in terms of how the foundations on which they were constructed led to their collapse.

This idea is clearly a reflection of Poe's constructions in "The Fall of the House of Usher;" and in fact, much of the action of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Beloved* takes place within the cultural context of the 19th century, the same culture being critiqued by Poe.¹⁰ I will discuss the idea of the House/house as feminine space, an embodiment of otherness, and how this perception of the Houses/houses *re-visions* our reading of their

destruction in the texts being discussed, and of the silence that stands as the primary mode of discourse in such spaces, and how recognition of this mode as legitimate and meaningful "saying" enables an understanding of these texts that is otherwise impossible.

The house of fiction is a common metaphor in American literature. As Marilyn Chandler has observed

Our literature reiterates with remarkable consistency the centrality of the house in American cultural life and imagination. In many of our major novels a house stands...as a unifying symbolic structure that represents and defines the relationships of the central characters to one another, to themselves, and to the world and raises a wide range of questions... (Chandler 1)

Among these questions, we must include those asked by Gaston Bachelard, whose work *The Poetics of Space* opened the door to phenomenological probings into the space of the house, as well as created a space in which to analyze the effect of the house as metaphor on the human imagination. He writes

[relative to the "problem of the poetics of the house,] the questions abound: how can secret rooms, rooms that have disappeared, become abodes for an unforgettable past? ...Not only our memories but things we have forgotten are "housed." Our soul is an abode. And by remembering houses and rooms, we learn to abide within ourselves....It [the house] is body and soul. It is the human being's first world. (Bachelard xxxvi, 6)

Indeed, what Robert Mugeraur says of architecture, that it has "both the task and possibility of opening a world," (Mugeraur 216) is as true of a text as of a building.

The house is also "a metaphor for interiority (in the sense of "selfhood"),..." (Romero 21), and as such both reveals and in some ways determines the character of its inhabitants. As Chandler observes, "American writers have generally portrayed the structures an individual inhabits as bearing a direct relationship or resemblance to his or

her psyche and inner life, and as constituting a concrete manifestation of specific values" (Chandler 10).

Moreover, the archetypal form of the house in terms of phenomenological architecture is that of a "type of vessel, the function of which is to contain something and thereby split the world in two: to establish simultaneously an inside world which contains and an outside world which excludes" (Silverstein 83). The inside world is experienced as "a hollow, concave space" (Silverstein 87), metaphorically a womb, and thus, even without the social value system that has historically dictated that "a woman's place is in the home," the interior of the house is phenomenologically a feminized space.

Relative to the binary system, the house is the "surface that separates the region of the same from the region of the other" (Bachelard 222). The house, then, is analogous to the binary line itself, dividing the world. For the purposes of this argument, it is important to recognize that the system of binary oppositions exists not simply as a way of defining difference, but of enforcing both the idea that difference is central to our interactions and perceptions, and the seeming necessity of arranging difference as both natural and naturally hierarchical. Within our culture, this system is seen as largely predicated on sexual division, and although "most ancient mythologies contain an expression of a duality—that of Self and Other This duality was not originally attached to the division of the sexes" (de Beauvoir 82). Furthermore, though this duality of Self and Other has always existed, duality as a concept in and of itself means only "two contained in one; twofold." The "*setting apart* of all pairs of opposites" is a distinctly patriarchal operation (Heilbrun xix).

Paradoxically, even in patriarchal cultures, it is our "instinct to create relationship between things," (Silverstein 79), to look for patterns of meaning which can only be found by bringing things together, not by division. One locus of the search for patterns of meaning is in our concept of place. Places are "indeterminate wholes" and "... above all territor[ies] of meaning" (Relph 36). Heidegger's concept of dwelling¹¹ as a way of expressing *being-in-the-world* strengthens the meaning of place as a representation of our search for meaning in both the world outside and the world of the Self because it rejects the interpretation that the experience of place can be reduced to a simple division between subject and object. It would be a misunderstanding of the concept of place to define it "in terms of a subject facing a mute world of objects which the subject then has to endow with meaning" (Harries 52).

Ideally, such categories and divisions would be seen as false and the dwelling place as a space of wholeness, a space of *being-in-the-world* which is both "...being a self and being with others. We cannot sacrifice one aspect to the other without doing harm to human nature" (Heidegger 58). To do so tears apart a potentially whole Self just as it rents houses asunder, yet this is exactly the function of the ideological system of patriarchal cultures. "Our future salvation lies in a movement away from sexual polarization and the prison of gender toward a world in which individual roles and modes of behavior can be freely chosen" (Heilbrun ix); just as "a house divided cannot stand," so is the hierarchical division between the dualistic aspects of humankind ultimately destructive. Yet this division is the foundation of patriarchal ideology. It is worth noting that perhaps much of the reason that these themes appear more strongly in Southern

literature than other genres is that the South is a "culture that remained patriarchal even longer than other regions of America" (MacKethan 5).¹²

The novels in this study demonstrate that the binary slash does violence to what is truly natural; a "condition under which the characteristics of the sexes and the human impulses expressed by men and women are not rigidly assigned" (Heilbrun x). The word *slash* implies violence, particularly violence against the feminine and the other(s) housed to the right of it. Besides the violence associated with its meaning as a verb, as a noun, slash is also a derogatory term for female genitalia. Its graphic representation is a leaning wall such as would be found in a house with an unstable or degraded foundation, indicative of a crumbling structure. The slash overshadows and threatens the terms standing to the right of it, urged by the masculine, active, Subject group on the left, defining its One through the otherness of the Other.

This system of difference and privileging that results in unstable constructs and enforced division is a system collapsing in on itself, represented by decaying and ultimately collapsed or otherwise ruined houses in the works of Poe, Faulkner, Warren, Morrison, and other American writers.¹³ The patriarchal order is the ideological system on which the Victorian ideal of the family is constructed, "that "family evil"—19th century bourgeois domestic ideology itself" (May 395). This ideology is the foundation of the family, and the family is the foundation of Southern culture. This is the culture that Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!*; Sunder Spottwood in *Meet Me in the Green Glen*; Lank Tolliver in *Flood*; Edward Bodwin in *Beloved* and the Butler family in *Song of Solomon* represent:

[s]outhern society was, almost from the outset a family-centered society. Indeed, in the Old South the patriarchal family typified to a large extent the proper relations between ruler and ruled and so supplied the primal model for social organization... (Bleikasten 156).

Of course, "...in the cultural structure of the South, the space of everyday existence was based on the domain, reflecting the family as the center" (Ruzicka 9). So whatever can be argued about the flawed ideology of society can be extended to the family and from the family to the houses they inhabit. With such faulty foundations, these institutions, and the houses which represent them, are destined for destruction, or doomed to collapse on themselves in a final act of subversion and, paradoxically, survival.

In the works being discussed here, traditional categories seem themselves to decay and fall apart. The One (Self)/Other division, and by extension, the masculine/feminine and related dichotomies, become fluid, "...a simultaneously terrifying and potentially liberating vision" (Chandler 394).

For example, some of the male characters of Faulkner's novel, particularly "Henry & Bon & Quentin & Shreve" are merged in different combinations but always as androgynous figures,¹⁴ and like Roderick Usher seem to slide over the binary wall with great ease, while women, like Rosa, Judith and Clytie scale it from the other side and wind up firmly grounded on the left. The feminine then becomes the active subject, at times (in Faulkner) even crossing race and gender lines, and though she remains anchored on the other side by being associated with interiors, the feminine (other) element in these stories is responsible for upholding the Houses, both the building and the family it shelters and represents.

In as much as the feminine represents "fertility...the forces of life and death," and that basic biology tells us that procreation requires both a male and female participant (dare we say subject?), the suppression and destruction of the feminine leads necessarily to sterility and the end of the line for both the Usher and Sutpen Houses. Usher is not by accident the "last of the ancient race of Ushers." He is a man who has "cut himself off not only from generation, but from the feminine sources of life that are embodied in his distanced/ "dead" sister" (Hoeveler 389). By turning her into a static (dead) object, he dooms himself to be the last of the Ushers, just as Sutpen wrecks his plans for a dynasty through his own objectification of the feminine. His proposal to Rosa, that she should breed with him on a trial basis, to be married if the product of that experiment is male, reduces her, as he reduces women throughout the text, to the status of cattle or brood mare.

Such comparisons between women and livestock are made repeatedly and culminate in his question regarding Milly's "test product", "Damn your black hide, horse or mare?" His later statement, the one that produces in Wash Jones an outrage and hate so huge that it bursts from him and kills Sutpen, the demon even the War couldn't bring down, "Too bad you're not a mare too. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable" (AA 286) seems to illustrate clearly enough Sutpen's attitude toward women.

His view of others as objects dooms him to not producing another family—if not for his outrageous proposal, Rosa would surely have married Sutpen, giving him another chance to bring his design to fruition—and moreover, sets in motion the events by which his existing family is destroyed. In his encoding of Eulalia and Charles Bon as other,

marking them as inessential and separating them from his design, he sowed the seeds, quite literally, of the destruction of his design. They turned out to be very essential; active subjects that broke free of his definitions of them and came back, like the entombed Madeline Usher, to bring down his House/house.

And like Madeline's, their stories are not voiced in the text, leaving gaping holes to be patched by the fanciful conjecture of Shreve and Quentin. For instance, we do not know that Eulalia Bon sent Charles to Sutpen, or even if Charles knew from the outset that Sutpen was his father, or whether he came for recognition or retribution. Knowing these facts would fill out the story and shed light into the dim corners we are left staring into at the story's end. The obliteration of others' stories, through repression, distortion, objectification and an inability to recognize the "authentic saying" of silence in these houses results directly in their collapse, which confirms the centrality of the Other/others to the texts, confirms them as subjects not objects, however objectified they are by the narrators who present them.¹⁵

Taking women and the Other/others to be central to these texts changes our perception of both the characters and the stories, and reminds us that

there has always been more than one way to tell the American story; indeed that there has been more than one story to tell—not just that of the American Adam, for instance, but also that of the American Eve; not just that of the American Scholar, but that of the American Slave...(Jordan ix)

When we visit the second story of the House of Usher, for example, Madeline Usher becomes a subject, though abjected by Roderick and the narrator, rather than a floating object or an entombed corpse.¹⁶ Roderick becomes the androgynous hero, able

to cross the permeable boundaries within the House of Usher that have separated him from his sister, the embodied feminine. His "reviving sympathies with and for his sister precipitate her return from the tomb to the text" (Jordan 11) and his rejection of the one-sided masculine narrative makes room in the House for her story.

Rosa Coldfield, also androgynous and other, like her "double" Clytie, becomes, at last, something more than a "spinsterish, hysterical" voice, unworthy of the reader's serious attention as misogynist Faulkner critic Irving Howe and others of his ilk have claimed. And when her perspective is duly recognized as both valid and true, *Absalom, Absalom!* becomes yet another (hi)story, a record of a hidden piece of the tapestry of the Southern (history) (culture) (myth) story, a second story in the House of Sutpen, a story that emerges to take center stage in Morrison's work.

Similarly, women's voices in Warren's later novels have been often ignored or misunderstood. As Lucy Ferriss argues, Cassie Spottwood is clearly the subjective narrative presence that focalizes the story in *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, but she is not regarded as the novel's subject by *any* of the book's critics. Maggie Tolliver and Lettice Poindexter of *Flood* are not viewed by critics in the same terms as the male protagonists, though they clearly demonstrate all Warren's criteria for the hero.¹⁷

In Faulkner and Warren's works under examination here, both Houses and houses are structurally unsound by the time we encounter them, and the figures of otherness have been entombed or otherwise silenced, their voices sounding clearly in 124 Bluestone, Danville, VA and in Pilate Dead's little Detroit shanty.

Historically, then, by including the structured absences that represent the stories

of characters whose stories are inexpressible, Faulkner and Warren show much improvement over Poe's tentative renderings of such an absence. In the *House of Usher*, the other is buried in a vault that prevents both escape and combustion while the narrator assumes textual control and the androgynous Roderick struggles with recovering the second story.¹⁸ Removal of the feminine half of the duality these siblings represent has resulted in sterility, the end of the line, for both the "ancient race" and the crumbling house. Her shrieking is all we are given by the narrator, who renders the voice of the feminine just as Plato described women's speech; "lacking form...therefore without meaning, unformed, chaotic, evanescent" (Elshtain 82), and in the end, again we hear a "long, tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters" (417)—a voice representing perhaps a thousand sisters emerging from their airless vaults" (May 395). Poe is, then, a starting point for giving voice to the other in narrative, just as his *House of Usher* is the shadowy abode that initially defines the importance of the house as a repository of metaphors in the American imagination, and demonstrates the ideology that is housed in American cultural values.

Many critics have noted observed that on some level, Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* is a metaphoric playing out of the famous quote from a 1858 speech by Abraham Lincoln, "A house divided against itself cannot stand...". Warren's late novels, *Flood* and *Meet Me in the Green Glen* similarly address this trope. Michael Hogan in his essay "Built on the Ashes," extends this metaphoric echo to Morrison's *Beloved*, and I suggest that in fact, the fall of the South and the falling houses of Southern fiction, is also a playing out of this prophecy. It could be argued that America itself, and western culture

in general, are built on ideologies that divide the house, not just of American fiction, but American history and culture. And for this reason

In the house of fiction you can hear, today, the deep stirring of the unhomely...this awkward word...captures something of the estranging sense of the relocations of the home and the world in an unhallowed place. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the unhomely be easily accommodated in that familiar division of the social life into private and the public spheres. The unhomely moment creeps up as stealthily as your own shadow, and suddenly you find yourself, with Henry James' Isabel Archer, taking the measure of your dwelling in a state of "incredulous terror. (Bhabha 445)

Surely this state of "incredulous terror" describes the state of things at 124 Bluestone, and Milkman Dead's experience at the Butler house. Much of contemporary Southern fiction addresses this sense of being "unhomed" in the world. This is not, of course, exclusive to Southern literature. As Marilyn Chandler observes, "we have evolved to a literature of homelessness" (Chandler 20), but because of the importance of home and place in Southern literature up to this point, the change is perhaps more noticeable.

Writers of the "New New South," or the "Sunbelt South," as it is alternately referred to, depict home as a place to run from rather than a "A Place To Come To," the title of Robert Penn Warren's last novel. Writers like Richard Ford, Barry Hannah and Linda Bruckheimer create stories of nomadic Southerners fleeing their homes, and usually their "Southernness" as well. If these writers do focus on the Southern home, it is with a eye toward the grotesque, as in McCarthy's *Child of God*, or the charmingly eccentric as in John Dufresne's *Louisiana Power and Light*, T.R. Pearson's *Gospel Hour* and Lee Smith's depictions of the Appalachian South as alternately quirky *and* grotesque or at the very least, pathetic.

But counter to this trend, women writers of the Southern story and Afro-Southern

writers are creating a tradition built in the space carved out among the ruins of the old Southern literary tradition by Toni Morrison. Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* is an invocation of the Afro-Southern literary and cultural traditions. Set in the Georgia sea islands, a matriarchal community of freed slaves tells a story unheard in American literature to this point. Randall Keenan, in a voice more similar to the works of Zora Neale Hurston than any other contemporary writer possesses, creates a similarly enchanted space in *A Visitation of Spirits* and *Let the Dead Bury the Dead*, rendering the Southern black experience in terms both realistic and surreal. Likewise, the postmodern novel *Oxherding Tale* by Charles Johnson builds a complex narrative in the style of Faulkner, telling exactly the stories that are absent in the work of the latter.

Women writers such as Josephine Humphreys, Gail Godwin, Alice Adams and Bobbie Ann Mason write sparse, succinct tales of women whose day to day lives and problems are firmly rooted in the region and the values of the contemporary South. Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina*, Gail Fowler's *When Women had Wings* and Kaye Gibbon's *Ellen Foster* give voice to the previously inexpressible experience of domestic violence and abuse that is also the legacy of the patriarchal violence that threads through Southern history in a variety of ways. Kaye Gibbon's other works, particularly *Charms for the Easy Life* paint pictures of women's lives in the South that tie them to the universal experiences of women worldwide but also make them unique, tying them to a distinctly Southern past in surprising ways.

In each of these contemporary Southern works, and the works of several white male authors, like Gregory Brown in *Decorations in a Ruined Cemetery* and Brett Lott's

stunning book, *Jewel*, the home is of great significance. The structures that house these contemporary Southern stories have as much metaphorical significance as those of Faulkner, Warren and Morrison, and often echo their concerns about space, language and the ability to tell a "true" story and thereby come into being. These concerns unite them with earlier writers and reveal that in many ways, both the tradition and the future of Southern letters are built over the ruins of a not-so distant history of division, domination and loss:

...despite the oft-bemoaned homogenization of the nation, the South continues to have a special identity quite apart from the rest of the nation, even when that identity sometimes seems just as different from the South's own past. To choose only one of many subjects, today, as much as ever, change, loss and an effort to limn the contours of a vanishing world appear to be vital impulses for many Southern writers. The difference lies in the subjects "lost": not just the old plantation, but the plantation quarters; not just the isolation of the mountains but also their crafts and customs (Lee Smith); not just Old New Orleans but also its decency and honor (Nancy Lemann). And charting a world of loss, of course, goes all the way back to George Washington Cable, William Faulkner, Jean Toomer and Katherine Ann Porter, to name just a few of our elegists. (Lowe 18)

The Southern story is a story of loss on all sides, but through the work of writers like Faulkner and Warren, who framed in their texts the experiences and voices they could not render, and writers like Toni Morrison, who gathered the pieces and translated the language of the "dislocated howling" in their works, the current and future writers of the Southern story have been brought to realize, as Richard Wright prophesied in his 1941 work, *Twelve Million Black Voices*, "...the ties that bind us are deeper than those that separate us. The common road of hope which we all have traveled has brought us into a stronger kinship than any words, laws or legal claims" (Wright 146).

By *re-visioning* Faulkner and Warren relative to a reading of Morrison and a

recognition of their concerns with absence, silence and space, we might come closer to a true representation of the Southern story, and be able to finally fulfill Shreve McCannon's long ago request to "[t]ell about the South" (AA 174).

CHAPTER ONE: WILLIAM FAULKNER

DARK HOUSES AND DEAFENING SILENCES:

ABSALOM, ABSALOM! AND "EVANGELINE"

The house is at once an intense place of refuge from the world and an expansive place of confrontation with the world. That so simple a form can bring to life these polarities is perhaps the mystery...of the archetype of home"

Murray Silverstein, from "The First Roof"

*Turn your eyes to the immoderate past,
Turn to the inscrutable infantry rising
Demons out of the earth—they will not last.*

Allen Tate

Heidegger writes in "Building Dwelling Thinking" that poetry is the primal form of building, "the original admission of dwelling" (227), and that "dwelling is the basic character of Being" (160), bringing his reader to focus on the question of what it means to dwell and what relationship dwelling bears to language. These same questions present themselves to the reader of Faulkner.

The issue of authentic dwelling and its relationship to Being, and the issue of building a true story out of the fragments of narrative, a story which is in some ways "unspeakable", and must therefore transcend the limits of language share a focus in many of Faulkner's stories. Not by coincidence, many of these have architecturally suggestive titles and themes, such as *Sanctuary*, *Pylon*, *The Mansion* and the original title of both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Light in August*, *Dark House*. And even beyond this list, stories like "A Rose for Emily," "Evangeline," "Barn Burning," and "The Fire and the Hearth," make pointed use of the architectural spaces within the house and their metaphorical meanings for individual characters as well as within the cosmos of Yoknapatawpha County.

The symbolic significance of the house was obviously on Faulkner's mind during the period in which he produced his greatest works (1929-1940), but there is no story in which the house figures so prominently as in *Absalom, Absalom!* (hereafter abbreviated as *AA*), which begins in a "dim, hot airless room, with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers," (7).

Many critics have noted that this description and others that recur to describe Rosa Coldfield's house in terms of its stale closeness is as suited to its inhabitant as to its rooms. The tale she is telling is the story of Thomas Sutpen; the building of his house, both the dwelling and the dynasty to inhabit it, its early emptiness, its middle years of splendor, its long decline and fall to ruin spurred by events in the lives of the family and parallel to its fall, and finally of its utter destruction by fire. Like Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," the fate of the house is inexorably tied to the fate of the family.

Faulkner clearly represents familial and social relationships relative to the metaphor of the house, and spatially within the house. From the beginning of Sutpen's story, we are aware that this is a house built not with dwelling but only with owning in mind. Torn violently from the earth in the language of rape, designed by a harried French architect (who is hunted down with dogs when he tries to flee before completing the project) and built by slaves, Sutpen's Hundred depends for its very existence on the exploitation and later on the exclusion of the other(s). This is the flaw that destabilizes the foundation on which so many houses, as well as histories, are built. In Faulkner, this ideological foundation is clearly seen as being at fault in the collapse of houses, and in the failure of individuals, families and, by extension, the failure of the South to carry on, or to rise again.¹

In Faulkner's work, we see a subversion of this divisive ordering system. Ultimately, Faulkner is about the business of tearing down the house, exposing the design that is its foundation. Furthermore, *Absalom, Absalom!* demonstrates the importance of the voice of the other to telling a whole and authentic story. Also important for our purposes here, Faulkner's texts point to the need for a recognition of silence as a mode of discourse, one which is used primarily by the figures of otherness. It seems to me that for Faulkner, as well as for Heidegger, the "being silent of silence" is named "authentic saying," and the "ringing of stillness...is [ultimately] the language of Being."²

The Yoknapatawpha stories tear at the fabric of the binary system. They collapse, conflate and redefine terms; they leave no Absolutes standing, and in the end offer alternatives for creating and receiving truths and (hi)stories. Moreover, by reading these

stories through a critical lens that seeks to bring together rather than dissect the multiple threads of the narrative, new truths are revealed about Faulkner's ideas of gender, race and the past, and how issues of gender, race and history figure into the truths of the South.

In his 1946 essay on Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren wonders, "To what extent does Faulkner work in terms of polarities, oppositions, paradoxes, inversions of roles? How much does he employ a line of concealed (or open) dialectic progression as a principle for his fiction?" and suggests that "the study of these questions may lead to the discovery of principles of organization in [Faulkner's] work not yet defined by criticism." The critical lens employed here seeks to discover not only Faulkner's organizing principles in the Yoknapatawpha stories, but in as far as Faulkner's work reflects the South as he perceived it, to comment on how Faulkner's work reflects certain truths about the South as he saw it, and establish a foundation for discussion of other writers of the South, particularly Warren, and Morrison, relative to what Faulkner says and maybe more importantly, cannot say, about the South.

Intellectually, we recognize that truth and history are made up of a multiplicity of voices, stories and perspectives. As William James wrote in *Notions of Truth*, "our account of truth is an account of truths in the plural...truth is made...in the course of experience" (92). The Yoknapatawpha County novels, of which *Absalom, Absalom!* is certainly the center and arguably the best, comment on the need to tear down our old and tired Truth and construct in its place new truths, new (hi)stories that give voice to the experiences of the other Americans. True stories can only be told when all the

perspectives are gathered, because truth is "a matter of getting as much intersubjective agreement as you can" (Rorty 47), and some of the characters in *Absalom, Absalom!*, indeed the whole of the novel, and many other works of Southern literature need to be revisited with this in mind.

Further, Faulkner raises the Heideggerean question of whether "man is the shaper of language or language the shaper of man," and resolves it pragmatically, as we will see. At crucial moments in the texts under examination here, silence replaces language as the dominant mode of discourse. The stories that reside in the silence of Faulknerian structures, both architectural and narrative, rise to the level of discourse, in the end, telling the truest tales, and providing a model for reading other Southern texts as well.

Robert Dale Parker in his essay "The Other Coldfields: Gender, Commerce and the Exchange of Bodies in *Absalom, Absalom!*", enters into the discussion of the text by saying that "Some see the novel as a study in the incapacity of observations to harden into explanation, a study of the ever-deferred status of explanation itself" (239). This is, I think, a valid interpretation of the notion of truth that underlies both the story and the form in which Faulkner chooses to tell it.

The re-telling of this story in several forms (the short stories, "Evangeline," "Wash," "Sutpen I" and the early version of the novel which appeared in *American Mercury*) from different, but singular and linear points of view, and finally pulling all these perspectives into the final edition, indicates Faulkner's need to tell this tale and have it viewed from various perspectives in order to truly and totally get it told. Some critics believe he chooses this narrative structure because of "the enormity of the Sutpen story"³.

I see the style of this novel, which because of its position at the center of the Yoknapatawpha County stories pulls in not just Sutpen's story, but the threads of a whole host of narratives and characters from the other novels in this series (as well as some very interesting but only partially told tales of unique characters--Eulalia Bon for example), as indicative of what Faulkner is about in the overall project of the Yoknapatawpha series.⁴

The structure Faulkner is building is one that recognizes fluidity, multiplicity and the importance of perspective and experience in constituting a truth. And the first step toward such a revisioning, is to question the silence of the other in the texts in question, for which Heidegger's theories of space, language and being are especially relevant, and lead me to wonder, not just what the silent stories could have revealed, but what Faulkner was trying to reveal about his project in silencing them.

In the end, I see Faulkner's project in the Yoknapatawpha County stories as laying a foundation for later Southern narratives. A stable foundation, not girded in division and domination, but one on which could be built a completely different structure, one that recognizes fluidity, multiplicity and the importance of perspective and experience in constituting a truth. The first step toward such a *re-visioning*, is to question the silence of the "other" in the texts in question, for which Heidegger's theories of space, language and being are especially relevant, and lead me to wonder, not just what the "unvoiced" stories could have revealed, but what Faulkner was trying to reveal about his project in silencing them.

It will first be important to recognize that the binary system exists not simply as a way of defining difference, but of enforcing both the ideas of difference as central to our

interactions and perceptions, and the seeming necessity of arranging difference as both natural and naturally hierarchical. Within our culture, this system is also seen as largely predicated on sexual division, and that although "most ancient mythologies contain an expression of a duality—that of Self and Other This duality was not originally attached to the division of the sexes" (de Beauvoir 82). Furthermore, though this duality of Self and Other has always existed, duality as a concept in and of itself means only "two contained in one; twofold." The "*setting apart* of all pairs of opposites" is a distinctly patriarchal operation (Heilbrun xix).

Paradoxically, even in patriarchal cultures, it is our "instinct to create relationship between things," (Silverstein 79), to look for patterns of meaning which can only be found by bringing things together, not by division. One locus of the search for patterns of meaning is in our concept of place. Places are "indeterminate wholes" and "... above all territor[ies] of meaning" (Relph 36). Heidegger's concept of dwelling as a way of expressing *being-in-the-world* strengthens the meaning of place as a representation of our search for meaning in both the world outside and the world of the Self because it rejects the interpretation that the experience of place can be reduced to a simple division between subject and object.⁵ It would be a misunderstanding of the concept of place to define it "in terms of a subject facing a mute world of objects which the subject then has to endow with meaning" (Harries 52).

But Thomas Sutpen makes just such a mistake, he "dwells inauthentically because he seeks his own perfection not by living a meaningful existence, but by appropriating the house to his own being.... The mansion is not built to be a dwelling but to be a

possession, not a *place*, but an appropriated object" (Ruzicka 52-3). He builds it to own it, as he owns his slaves and later his family. Moreover, he builds it to beget upon it ("without gentleness begot, Miss Rosa Coldfield says") his design.

Just as he sees Ellen Coldfield, the wife he had gone to town to find "exactly as he would have gone to the Memphis market to find livestock or slaves" (AA 42), so he sees the house: as an object that he can impregnate with his design. But the house is also a protective space in which his design and his identity can gestate. He comes seeking sanctuary, "some place to hide himself," (AA 14) and in that "shell," he comes to *be*. Just as he proclaims his design into being with his "Be Sutpen's Hundred, like the oldentime Be Light" (AA 9) he brings himself into being as well in the "naked rooms of embryonic formal opulence," (AA 39). He waits there, in that space, to afford the objects with which to fill this huge object, this edifice, this body in which he implants his design, this body he himself begot upon the land and in turn begot his design upon (AA 67).

In the language of rape he brings forth house and family, "tore violently" the plantation, "without gentleness begot" the children, and drags "from the tranquil and astonished earth" (AA 14) the objects he would need to fulfill his design. The house then becomes a shell which he impregnates with his spirit, his "Sutpen-ness," his life force, but it is also a protective womb in which he develops into his own Sutpen-ness.

Prior to the building of the house, Sutpen was a cipher, not yet a demon, but only a stranger; "man and beast looking as though they have been created out of thin air and set down in the bright summer sabbath sunshine...face and horse that none of them had ever seen before, name that none of them had ever heard, and origin and purpose which

some of them were never to learn" (AA 32). As the house comes into being, so does Sutpen. Upon the completion of the house, or at least, completion of the frame, for Sutpen does not decorate the interior. The shell alone is what stands for him.

This shell, the unfurnished house with neither doorknobs nor glass in the windows, becomes at that point his space of sanctuary and the womb for his gestation and coming into being. Gaston Bachelard, in his analysis of the experience of space in the human imagination, observes that the house often acts as a shell. Bachelard notes that "[e]verything about a creature that comes out of a shell is dialectical. And since it doesn't come out all the way, the part that remains inside contradicts the part that is outside" (Bachelard 108). It dwells in an interstitial space, a state of constant in-between-ness. The experience of the shell creature is one of emergence, and in our imagination, the shell becomes "a pretext for multiplying images of emerging" (Bachelard 109). Sutpen's house is a shell for many of the characters, including Quentin, though he never comes to live there. It is for all of them a space from which they emerge much changed, though none so much as the man himself, emerging from his empty palace after his gestation period. In keeping with Bachelard's observation that "a creature that hides and withdraws into its shell is preparing a way out," (Bachelard 111), Sutpen's shell fulfills the purposes of sanctuary and womb.

Bachelard expands on his discussion of the phenomenology of the inhabited shell in a way that is also descriptive of Sutpen and Sutpen's Hundred:

...the obvious dynamism of these extravagant creatures lies in the fact that they come alive in the dialectics of what is hidden and what is manifest....This is true of the entire scale of metaphors, from the resurrection of a man from his grave, to the sudden outburst of one who has long been silent...we have the impression that

by staying in the motionlessness of its shell, the creature is preparing temporal explosions, not to say whirlwinds, of being. (Bachelard 111)

Sutpen and the house itself basically explode and cause explosions of being in all the characters touched by them. Sutpen himself mesmerizes the narrators and the reader; none would argue that though a "demon," he is clearly an object of much rapt and even admiring attention in the text. His charisma, it would seem to me, stems from these "dialectics of what is hidden and what is manifest," a dynamic that the text itself participates in. In fact, this is a text about the dialectics of what is hidden and what is manifest. The house and Sutpen's experience of it as a shell is analogous to the overall purpose of Faulkner to explore that dialectic.

During Sutpen's time in the house-as-shell, he lived in a state of simplicity, which was in the opinion of Mr. Compson, himself an enforcer of patriarchal codes and coding, a state "oddly akin to virtue...with no feminized softness"(AA 33), a weirdly "Spartan" womb, itself no space of nurture, "static" for three years. The house is the feminine body, representative of all the feminine bodies who pass through his life—his mother, his daughter, that body, like Millie Jones', on which he begets his design.

This is how place is experienced by most of the characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* and "Evangeline," as an object to be filled with other objects, not a meaningful place at all. At the same time, though, most of the characters in these texts (the exceptions being General and Mr. Compson) assign sentience and spirit to the houses of the texts. This would seem to imply a possible blurring of the subject/object division.

Related distinctions are also blurred in the texts, such as masculine/feminine and white/not-white, but each text contains at least one character who seeks to keep these

categories strictly delineated: Thomas Sutpen, his son, Henry, and Mr. Compson, and the framers of the narrative in "Evangeline." Even Rosa Coldfield, though she crosses many lines herself—she is both child and crone, insider and outsider to the Sutpen family, asexual and desirous of sexual union, male and female ("the man I perhaps should have been")—she enforces others, particularly the white/not-white division, seen clearly in her treatment of and attitude toward Clytie.

This system of difference and privileging which results in false constructs and enforced division is a system collapsing in on itself, represented by decaying and ultimately collapsed or otherwise ruined houses in the works of Poe, Faulkner, Warren and Morrison, as well as many other American writers. Patriarchal order is the ideological system on which the Victorian ideal of the family is constructed, "that "family evil"—19th century bourgeois domestic ideology itself" (May 395). This ideology is the foundation of the family.⁶

And the family is the foundation of Southern culture, which Sutpen represents:

[s]outhern society was, almost from the outset a family-centered society. Indeed, in the Old South the patriarchal family typified to a large extent the proper relations between ruler and ruled and so supplied the primal model for social organization...(Bleikasten 156)

And of course, "...in the cultural structure of the South, the space of everyday existence was based on the domain, reflecting the family as the center" (Ruzicka 9). So whatever can be argued about the flawed ideology of society can be extended to the family and from the family to the houses they inhabit. With such faulty foundations, these institutions, and the houses which represent them, are destined for destruction, or doomed to collapse on themselves in a final act of subversion and, paradoxically, survival.

In the stories being discussed here, traditional categories seem themselves to decay and fall apart. The One (Self)/Other division, and by extension, the masculine/feminine and related dichotomies, become fluid, "...a simultaneously terrifying and potentially liberating vision" (Chandler 394). Some of the male characters of Faulkner's novel, particularly "Henry & Bon & Quentin & Shreve" are merged in different combinations but always as androgynous figures⁷, and like Roderick Usher seem to slide over the binary wall with great ease, while women, like Rosa, Judith and Clytie scale it from the Other side and wind up firmly grounded on the left. The feminine then becomes the active subject, at times (in Faulkner) even crossing race and gender lines, and though she remains anchored on the Other side by being associated with interiors, the feminine (Other) element in these stories is responsible for upholding the Houses, both the building and the family it shelters and represents.

In as much as the feminine represents "fertility...the forces of life and death," and that basic biology tells us that procreation requires both a male and female participant (dare we say subject?), the suppression and destruction of the feminine leads necessarily to sterility and the end of the line for both the Sutpen House, just as it did for the House of Usher. The negation of their vitality to the house is linked to their negation in the text. The obliteration of their stories, through silencing, repression, distortion and objectification in these houses results directly in their collapse, which confirms the centrality of the Other/others to the texts, confirms them as subjects not objects, however objectified they are by the narrators who present them.

Rosa Coldfield, also androgynous and Other, like her "double" Clytie, becomes, at last, something more than a "spinsterish, hysterical" voice, unworthy of the reader's serious attention as misogynist Faulkner critic Irving Howe and others of his ilk have claimed. And when her perspective is duly recognized as both valid and true, *Absalom, Absalom!* becomes yet another (hi)story, a record of a hidden piece of the tapestry of the Southern (history) (culture) (myth) story, a second story in the House of Sutpen.

And Faulkner's representation of women, or rather our interpretation of it, also changes when we come to realize what he is doing with his structured absences, textual blanks and the uncertainty generated by too many possibilities. Judith Sutpen becomes more than an object, a character in Sutpen's story. Her one act of expression in the text places her much more fully within the human community and the sphere of meaning than any of Sutpen's actions. In fact, she defines (one of) the central theme(s) of the novel in this one brief speech to a virtual stranger:

You get born and you try this and you don't know why only you keep trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings, only the same strings are hitched to all the others all trying and they don't know why either...it can't matter...and yet it must matter because you keep on trying and or having to keep trying and then all of a sudden it's all over and all you have is a block of stone with scratches on it... (AA 127)

In this one sentence, she defines both Sutpen and the flaw, something which he can never understand and which no one else in the novel, except maybe Quentin, can voice. Sutpen never realizes, because he is tragically blinded by a design founded on division and destruction, that others are also a part of his *being-in-the-world*. He never

recognizes the interconnectedness of the human community; he doesn't even recognize that there *is* a human community.

Case in point, he drags around the stone with scratches (the imported tombstone he carries through the war), thinking that the stone says something, that it *is* something, like his house and his design say something, *are* something(s). Indeed, he carries the stone into battle, slowing down the wagons and his entire regiment. And the stone is called "Colonel," as if it were the man. He never understands the meaninglessness of his own existence, and so poignantly asks, "Where did I make the mistake in [the design], what did I do or misdo in it, whom or what injure by it to the extent which this would indicate. I had a design" (AA 263). Judith could have answered this for him, but because he regards her as inessential, he does not look to her for answers. And yet, she contains the answer, not just in her words but written on her body, her life, as a representative of exactly who and what he injured to arrive at the destruction of his design.

Judith's story, which could have told so much, is housed figuratively in the silent second story, and housed literally in the second story rooms of Sutpen's Hundred. Like many of Faulkner's women, the women of *Absalom, Absalom!* (except Rosa's escapist aunt, who flees in the night with nothing but the clothes on her back and is never mentioned again) "are constructed within the semantic coherence of closed spaces," (Díaz-Diocaretz 240).

Indeed, if Judith had been allowed to speak for herself, the pieces of the narrative which could only be conjectured by the other narrators, due to their exteriority to the story, could have been told by one who actually knew the truth, and the mysteries of the

text would have been solved. Because we can never know what Judith or the others in the house knew, we are tempted to shout in frustration, like the narrator of *Evangeline*, "...without it, the whole tale will be pointless" (*Evangeline* 63).

But this is precisely Faulkner's point; that there is no truth but the whole truth, and the whole truth can never be spoken when half of the speakers have been silenced by the other half, and their silence is held up against the spoken language of the male narrators and found to be only a lack rather than an alternative mode of saying. Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz points out in "Woman as Bounded Text" that Faulkner employs two *patterns of restriction* to define women: "one of objects (pictures, portraits as representation) and the other, of verbal enclosures concerning women as inscribed thought, in addition to her framing/framed situation in written texts as two emblematic modes of discourse" (Díaz-Diocaretz 247).⁸

I offer silence, and moreover a refusal to recognize silence as a mode of discourse, as a third pattern of restriction. For some characters, silence is the only authentic language Faulkner can reproduce on their behalf, and as much is said in that unrecognized mode as in any other in the text or in the critical discourse about the text.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* and its (pre)text, "*Evangeline*," the system by which the other is separated out and rendered "inessential" is questioned and shown to be hopelessly flawed. The other, both in terms of the feminine and the not-white, is shown to be quite essential to the family and the stability of the house, as we shall see. It is the absence of their stories, their uninterpreted silence, that is destructive. Using irony, architectural space and silence Faulkner shows that "[t]he females kept out of the

Symbolic dynasty—and for that reason causing the collapse of the dynasty—reappear namelessly as the space of potential nurture."⁹

Women, in other words, reappear as silent spaces within the space of nurture, the home. Moreland points out that in Faulkner,

irony...represents what innocence has repressed and excluded... what Conrad and Eliot called "the horror," and what Joyce called the "nightmare" of history...Faulkner represents as the repeatedly repressed and excluded voice of human suffering, of desire and grief. (Moreland 57)

In other words, the voice that could most authentically tell of "the horror," and the "nightmare of history," is the voice upon whom the horror and the nightmare has been visited, the voice of the exploited and excluded, the other.

Clytemnestra/Raby, "the one also named Sutpen", as she is referred to in "Evangeline" and the "Sutpen coffee-colored face" (AA 136) that Rosa even as a child recognizes, becomes the ultimate other, straddling every dividing line in the text. Ironically, she becomes the final owner of the House of Sutpen and its destroyer—and she, too, had a story, one framed by the thoughts and words of the narrators and her own obvious and meaningful silence.

She is both black and white; insider and outsider to the family; a female and an androgynous form; a force of nurture and a force of destruction. And almost completely silent in the text. By contrast, this same character (named Raby in this text) is the sole narrator of the Sutpen story in "Evangeline," and destroys the house for a completely different reason—because she's tired, not because she is afraid. In the (pre)text of "Evangeline," this character has access to language, speech and free action. Significantly, Raby has a family of her own, and a home, a subjectivity and a life lived apart from the

Sutpen story, unlike Clytie who lives and dies in the silence of the second story. As such, Raby is seen as a character in her own story, not just as a character in Sutpen's story. But in *Absalom, Absalom!*, her actions are reactions and her words are spoken only to keep dividing lines intact. Her story, by its very absence, speaks volumes. Weinstein recognizes that she is an object and signifier in the text, alluding to her absent narrative:

Clytie emerges as the semiotic center, the foregrounded figure in whom Faulkner's tormented racial imagination fuses a white paternity with a black career....Faulkner's positioning of subjectivity is critical. The awaiting object, silent but pregnant with signs to be decoded, is the black woman; the advancing subject, vocal and eventually producing the key that will decode. (Weinstein 57)

Quentin Compson is this “advancing subject,” the narrator who comes closest to deciphering Clytie’s experience in the Sutpen family. Though he would seem to be aligned with the white, male subjective presence of his father and grandfather, Quentin is also a divided figure; an insider and an outsider to the Southern ideology that his father and grandfather represent. More importantly, it is Quentin alone who is able to collect the Sutpen story after his encounter with Clytie, Jim Bond and Henry Sutpen. Whether he is able to do this because he recognizes the physical similarities in the three Sutpen’s or because he is able translate the language in the house of saying things “not in so many words,” or because Henry tells him something is unknown.

What is clear is that his narrative is the only one that comes close to touching on Clytie’s, but he will not be able to gather her story into his as Milkman Dead will do with Circe’s narrative in *Song of Solomon* under similar circumstances. In the latter, Morrison gives voice to the deep anguish of the character of Circe, alone in the decaying house. Faulkner has no access to this voice, and it is for this reason that, as Weinstein notes,

Clytie is "deprived of both regret and desire," (Weinstein 57), and deprived of the voice she had in "Evangeline." This change represents the way in which Faulkner's novel critiques the system that would silence such an important voice based on perceived and enforced divisions. Indeed, the whole narrative structure is such a critique, the conjectures and ambiguities, loose ends and outright fabrications highlight the fact that a story can't get told until all the tellers can get their voices heard.

If these others, Ellen, Judith, Clytie, Henry, Bon, Eulalia, their son and ultimately their son's son, Jim Bond, who inhabited the second story of Sutpen's house (many of them dying there) had been given a voice in the novel, we would not need to separate the events of the narrative into fact and conjecture.¹⁰

Sadly, almost 100 years after Poe first loosed the shrieking of the other in Southern literature, Faulkner's tale of division and destruction ends similarly, with the objectification of Rosa Coldfield into a doll, the silencing of the one feminine voice in the text and the inarticulate howling of that most tragic of others,

Jim Bond, the scion, the last of his race....[and Quentin], could see her [Rosa], struggling and fighting like a doll in a nightmare, making no sound, foaming a little at the mouth, her face...lit by one last wild crimson reflection as the house collapsed and roared away, and there was only the sound of the idiot negro left....there was nothing left now, nothing out there but that idiot boy to lurk around those ashes and those four gutted chimneys and howl until someone drove him away....and so she died. (AA 376)¹¹

But something else has happened in the course of the telling, in the very method of the telling, that makes this ending not so grim. Throughout *Absalom, Absalom!*, in his narrative form and the tale of Thomas Sutpen's flawed design, Faulkner highlights the impossibility of living out such divisions as the ones on which Sutpen's design rests.

Even Sutpen himself couldn't live by that system; just look at the "coffee-colored Sutpen face," or the "saddle-colored" one left howling in the ruins of the very design that produced him.

Faulkner posits the other as both essential and having a truth, a history, a story that, when distorted or ignored, leaves a gap, a missing stone or piece the absence of which destabilizes the structures of family, house and even the narrative itself. Thus, even in the end, the story never gets itself wholly told; it remains fragmented, partial and enigmatic. But if we, as readers, could revisit this and other dark houses with an ear for silence and grope our way up the crumbling staircase and the down the long hall, pry open one of those long-closed doors and enter into that most silent and abandoned of spaces, the bedroom, we might, like Quentin Compson, reappear with the missing pieces and thus be able to tell the whole story. And not just of Sutpen's Hundred, but of the whole South; telling stories like those of Toni Morrison that fill in the spaces necessarily left when the folks doing the telling are white men with a blood tie to the very land they write about.

Critics argue that Faulkner's text represents the repressed and excluded other "only as the still repressed and excluded, without any articulate voices..." (Moreland 57), but this reading does not recognize the authentic saying of silence. Like nature, woman, black, and object, silence is anchored on the "other" side of the binary line and as such is not recognized, either in the text or by most critics. But for many characters of the Southern novel, silence is the only available mode, the most authentic way of telling stories which are beyond language, "unspeakable," or at least in the American South of

both the antebellum time and of Faulkner's own, unspoken.

Though "few characters speak to these [others, and] none speaks *with* them," (Weinstein 93), they do manage to communicate amongst themselves. This communication, of which silence is the primary mode, is also bounded spatially. The figures of otherness in the text discourse only in the space of the upstairs, a private, feminized space where the silenced other can reappear as a subject with a story and a perspective all her own, regardless of whether her mode of discourse is recognized by the masculinist narrators and the critics who have followed their lead.

Even Mr. Compson, the book's most strict enforcer of patriarchal modes and codes, recognizes that even when all the existing threads of the story are brought together, "nothing happens....something is missing"(AA 208). *Absalom, Absalom!* is, in the end, a narrative about the failure of narrative, the failure of language to explain, to tell the truth of anything; it "presents itself structurally as the production of absence...[which] focuses on the ephemeral, the intangible, the unexpressed" (Novak 213). In *Absalom, Absalom!* and its (pre)(s)equel, *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner wrestles with

a constant tension between the compulsion to capture the experience — to explain and to describe — and the acute perception that the words and language structures employed to this end will always fall short of fully conveying the essence of the vision or of the motivating intention. (Walsh 41)

The experiences of many of the characters in these texts may be unspoken, but not expressed. Through his narrative structure and the use of eloquent silence, Faulkner draws attention directly to the absent stories that would unify the narrative. His narrative structure foregrounds the fact that many pieces are missing. His use of eloquent silence

gives resonance to the sounds of those whose voices he cannot render. Eloquent silence is a special category of silence. Peter Walsh notes that eloquent silence is "an effect [that] can be attained only when the limits of language have been dramatized, and the reader is left on the threshold of some imminent wisdom that is essentially wordless" (Walsh 28).

Part of Faulkner's strategy for bringing readers to this threshold is to give the significant portions of the narrative to narrators who cannot interpret the sounds coming from the second story. With the exception of Quentin Compson, all of the narrators act to enforce patriarchal modes, and so are unable to hear the stories of the others because they don't recognize the mode of discourse being used. For them, the spoken word is the only recognizable discourse for representing reality, for telling this "true" (hi)story, but "if the other is encountered always through representation, ...then the *otherness* of the other is never genuinely encountered" (Vasey 318), and the (hi)stories they could tell cannot be heard, much less interpreted or understood.

Judith and Clytemnestra Sutpen "...are said to be silent, inscrutable, enigmatic....as female, and in Clytie's case, black, they cannot be made sense of, or rather there is no sense to be made because such qualities have no narrative meaning in the patriarchal context" (Byerman 219). In this novel, the aim of which is "not a proliferation of significations...but a kind of articulated, deeply meaningful silence,"¹² the figures of otherness inhabit distinct spaces in the house, namely the intimate, private spaces of the upstairs bedrooms.

These rooms are closed off; as readers, we see only the closed doors or hear footsteps overhead, or more often we encounter "...the barren hall with its naked

stair...rising into the dim upper hallway where an echo spoke ..." (AA 137). Sutpen is never seen upstairs, though Ellen retires there early on to disappear from the text entirely and die unseen behind the closed door. Judith takes the corpse of Charles Bon into the room, closing the door behind them, a sad parody of the wedding night they will never have; Henry Sutpen becomes a corpse in the same room. Readers see neither man there.

The upstairs rooms are the locus of otherness and of silence. All the figures of otherness disappear into that space and what happens to them there is represented as a silence in the text. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the reader is always located in the aftermath of action, in a "series of consequences the causes of which are mysteriously obscured, intentionally absented and unspoken" (Novak 204), communicated "without words," often through sounds other than language (a shot, an echo, the crashing in of a door, footsteps). And many of the novel's most significant communiqués take place in the utter silence and narrative invisibility of the upstairs room, a room every textual other has entered and where all but Quentin Compson will die.¹³

Clytemnestra or Raby as she is named in "Evangeline" becomes the ultimate other, straddling every dividing line in the text. Ironically, she becomes the final owner of the House of Sutpen and its destroyer. Raby's burning of the house is, by her own account, a willful action, whereas Clytie's burning of it seems a forced reaction. We are told by Quentin and Shreve (neither of whom were there, of course) that Clytie burns it because she confuses the ambulance sent by Miss Rosa with a paddywagon "coming to carry Henry into town for the white folks to hang him for shooting Charles Bon" (374) forty-five years earlier. We don't really know why she burns the house. We have only the

explanation given by the white, male, Canadian, Harvard student, Shreve McCannon, who has taken his cue from Mr. Compson, another white, male, this one the son of a former slave owner and Confederate hero, and the text's primary enforcer of patriarchal codes. How can the interpretation of these narrators regarding the thoughts, fears and motivations of a 76 year old mulatta slave woman possibly be believed? Here, again, we see Faulkner's irony at work; "Faulkner's irony, like Quentin's almost everywhere here *represents* [the other's] silence" (Moreland 58).

In "Evangeline," Raby is narrator of the Sutpen story because she is the only one with the knowledge and authority to tell it. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner robs her of her voice and in so doing, robs the narrative of authority. By putting the story in the words of characters who are either peripheral to or utterly outside the primary events they attempt to narrate, Faulkner forces us to reevaluate our categories of authority and subjectivity.

Clytie's silence directs us to Faulkner's real purpose in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and I would argue, ultimately in the whole of the Yoknapatawpha project. She is the penultimate of Faulkner's "figures of inexpressible significance, representations of the other" (Weinstein 89). Hers is the voice that Faulkner will not translate, the "psyche... never reduced to articulation" (Weinstein 89).

Some critics accuse Faulkner of "writing [the slave experience] out of the history he is attempting to create" (Novak 204), by objectifying and silencing black figures in his texts. But I see the text as concisely and consciously framing that experience, and through its silence on the subject, rendering it more significant for not having been reduced by

interpretation. Through silence, itself aligned with otherness in the system of binarisms, Faulkner points out that language, specifically his language, (which is also the language of 3 out of the 5 narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*) the language of a white Southern man, would be inadequate to represent the "genuine *otherness* of the other."

Moreover, these framed and significant silences, termed *structured absences* by Peter Walsh, highlight the failure of language to master and represent any reality. These silences are Faulkner's way of recognizing, as Heidegger did, that "man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language while in fact language remains the master of man....Language becomes the means of expression. As expression, language can decay into a mere medium for the printed word" (Heidegger 215), or for Faulkner's narrators, the spoken word. Silence then becomes Faulkner's "authentic saying," and *Absalom, Absalom!* a "narrative movement toward silence" (Novak 201).

And so it will be only through "patient listening" that we may both genuinely encounter the other that is the spirit of place in Sutpen's Hundred, and gain new understanding of Faulkner's choice of silence as the primary mode of discourse in the climax of the novel.¹⁴

The climactic chapter of the book, Chapter Nine, begins in "iron and impregnable dark," and the boys are oriented only by sound, with Shreve's voice speaking "in the darkness to Quentin's right." Quentin knows that Shreve has "turned, raising himself (by the sound) onto his elbow to look at Quentin," because the latter is shaking so violently that both boys "could even hear the bed" (360).

This opening scene is significant in that all action is conveyed by sound, as will

later be the case in the scene of Quentin's and Rosa's arrival at Sutpen's Hundred. They arrive in a darkness so complete that they can see neither each other nor the individual features of the house. Quentin can locate Miss Rosa only by "hearing her feet cross the gallery" (367), or most of the time by the sound of her breathing (367-369). Quentin knows when he enters the house through a window that he is in an empty, even unfurnished room; "the echo of his voice told him that" (368). And he knows when someone has entered the room not because he sees anyone or even senses the presence of someone behind him, but from the "sound of the scraped match" (368).

In his first encounter with Clytie, "[h]e remembered how she did not say one word to him, not Who are you? or What are you doing here" (369), and he understands that she already knows these things, though no one could have told her. As Quentin mounts the stairs, and seems on the verge of solving all the many mysteries of the text, silence falls in the house. Jim Bond is standing beside Clytie when Quentin looks down, "... (and he had not heard him enter)" (370). Nothing else is heard until the aftermath of the action.

Briefly, sight replaces sound as signifier. Quentin looks at Jim Bond and recognizes him as "the scion, the heir" (370) though no one has ever told him this nor has he ever seen Jim Bond (or any of the Sutpens) before. Rosa, on the other hand, does not to know the identity of Jim Bond, and tells him "You ain't any Sutpen!" (371). She encounters him in the invisibility of the darkness and cannot see what Quentin has seen, the "Sutpen-ness" of Jim Bond paralleling the "Sutpen-ness" of Clytie. Finally, Quentin goes up the stairs thinking, "I shall be sorry tomorrow, but I must see," and the next thing we know, he is coming back down the stairs.

It is in the unwritten (better to say unspoken, for this is a "speakerly text,") space between "I must see," and "So when he came back down the stairs..." (371), that the climactic action of the text takes place: Quentin meets Henry Sutpen, come home 45 years after murdering his half-black, half-brother (also his sister's fiancée), now dying in the upstairs bedroom. After all that noise, the silence is deafening. And representative, "...the trope of an express failing...the silence that breaks off speaking with pregnant exultancy, silence itself tumbling forth the obvious or else failing with a shuddering that plainly names what need not be spoken..."(Babich 93).

As he moves from the second story to the first, from the private, feminized space of the other to the public, masculine space of Sutpen's realm, he carries the story with him, in silence. Awaiting him in the downstairs hall, one of the most disputed and conflict-ridden areas of the house is only Clytie, sitting there just as Sutpen's tombstone, "the Colonel" was set there back in the Fall of 1864, her body as marked by Sutpen and the "chicken scratches" of his life as the stone itself.¹⁵

She is positioned at the bottom of the stairs, which themselves (like her) represent the binary line that divides public/private, masculine/feminine, One/Other, and she sits there in silence, not even looking up as Quentin crosses over from the one world to the other, and then out of the world of the house entirely, carrying with him the story of her family.

But how does Quentin get the story? He comes back down the stairs with the remaining fragments of the Sutpen story, fragments even Rosa does not possess, and yet, even in Shreve's vivid imaginings, he cannot make Clytie or even Henry speak. This

section is full of references to the fact that communication within the house does not require words:

she didn't tell you in so many words....didn't tell you in so many words anymore than she told you in so many words how she had been in the room the day when she brought Bon's body in and Judith took from his pocket the metal case she had given him; she didn't tell you, it just came out of the terror and the fear....and she didn't tell you in the actual words...nevertheless, she told you, or at least all of a sudden you knew. (AA 350-1)

Quentin is able to participate in this communication, just as he and Shreve communicate without words or even individual identities in the space created by their storytelling. Quentin, by virtue of his own otherness, is able to accept and participate in silent discourse. Taking place outside of encoded structures, of which language is necessarily one, these incidents of knowing without being speaking describe the way stories get told in this space without systems of division where all parties are both speaking and hearing, no subject or object, no black or white (this is the space in which Judith and Clytie, to the horror of Rosa, were just as likely to sleep together on the slave's pallet as on the mistress's bed). This is not a space which excludes, but a fluid, semiotic womb space where connection, not division, is the rule.

And it is in this space that Sutpen's story is handed off to Quentin Compson. Removed in time and space from many of the events described, even he questions, "why tell me? what is it to me..." (AA 12). It is his status as other that "twins" him to Rosa and makes him a suitable narrator of the actual Fall of the House of Sutpen.

Like the androgynous Roderick Usher, who tries repeatedly to take over the narrative by offering other mediums which would let him resurrect the "second story," so

is Quentin, whose androgyny is clear in relation to Shreve and their telling of the Henry-Bon part of the narrative, and also in as far as he is a double of Rosa, a conduit for the "second story" of the House of Sutpen.¹⁶ In this feminine, fluid and silent space, words are not necessary to tell the story; the others and their stories have existed without words in that space since it was "tranquil and astonished earth." Why should words be necessary now? Quentin's communication with Henry seems to take place in that same wordless space of not-language. Their conversation is in italics, like the sections of the text where Shreve and Quentin merge with each other, merge with Bon and Henry who are also merged, and like Rosa's speech that is Chapter Five.

Faulkner's narrative possibilities are an improvement over Usher, where the feminine other dies before uttering anything but a shriek. Or at least that's what Usher's narrator would have us believe. Maybe he, like Sutpen, simply could not bear any other possibility. If the other were to speak and let loose her story, prove herself to be a subject, how could he reconcile the *fact* of her with his *idea* of her? His ideological foundation would begin to collapse, the "barely perceptible fissure" would rent his world in two. Better, in Poe, whose narrative is a kind of foot in the door and precursor to Faulkner's more blatant criticisms, that this should be the fate of the House of Usher than be seen as the fate of patriarchal institutions and their (narrators) supporters.

But the structure of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the fact that so much is left unsettled and unsaid, indicates that the story of the other has still not been really told, that truths remain trapped in the second story and that until they are recovered, there can be no history, no

real truth to the tale. Sutpen's story, the story of the South, is still a myth, stories rather than History, parts of a whole that can't possibly stand divided.

And so we must turn from the foundations and structures of one part of Sutpen's design to the other; we must turn from the family to the house.

First, it is important to recognize that Sutpen initially builds the house as a sanctuary, a place to hide, as he likewise acquires Ellen as a "shield" of respectability. What is he hiding from, though? Sutpen is, of course, hiding from his origins, from his own status as an other. The One who defined Sutpen as Other and set him on the course of destruction was Pettibone. Well, not even Pettibone, but Pettibone's "man," the negro who shut the door in the boy Sutpen's face and in that moment defined him as Other, a definition that can only be escaped by finding another to Other, to set himself up against by way of defining himself as One.

This is the formative incident of his experience, an incident wherein "the comfort of his poor white identity was annihilated by a slammed door, [and] Sutpen desperately reaches out for another orientation, takes on his design" (Weinstein 185). This was the catalyst for his formation of a new identity, an identity to which the design was integral, even foundational. This moment is in fact the moment that rips Sutpen out of the fabric of human community, a fabric he will never stitch himself back into. His young body had "registered—and registered through touch: a slammed door—what it cannot erase" (Weinstein 137), and in this silent moment both design and flaw were born

into Sutpen's being. Upon returning from Pettibone's, his consciousness is altered in two important ways.

First, he internalizes the lens of the One who made him Other, and turns that lens on his family, specifically his sisters. This is the moment when he begins the process toward defining himself as One, aligning himself with Pettibone by objectifying and defining as Other his own family. He looks at his sister and sees a beast:

his sister pumping rhythmic up and down above a washtub in the yard...shapeless in a calico dress...and broad in the beam as a cow, the very labor she was doing brutish and stupidly out of all proportion to its reward: the primary essence of labor, toil, reduced to its crude absolute which only a beast could and would endure. (AA 236)

This is how he will continue to see others for the rest of his life, and this internalized view becomes his tragic flaw, this inability to see "whom or what" he had so injured as to bring the retribution of his designs' destruction upon him.

And in this same incident, Sutpen conceives his design: to become Pettibone. Not to escape the system that created Pettibone, but only to rise to the top of that system. This is a fatal error. The scene that created the design, the scene at the door, will be re-enacted throughout the book, notably in the incident where Charles Bon returns to the house of the father who abandoned him, "And [Sutpen] stood there, at his own door, just as he had imagined, planned, designed, and sure enough and after fifty years, the forlorn nameless and homeless lost child came to knock at it" (AA 267). The child is both Bon and Sutpen, the parallels obvious and irrefutable. And Sutpen "heard the design...come down like it had been built on smoke" (AA 267), and even then never realized that it was the design

itself, a design built on difference and exclusion and strict enforcing of outside/inside divisions, that caused it all.

He builds the house to shelter himself in, to act as a womb while his new identity, the identity of the One, gestates. The house is the space in which the design and the identity of the designer, each dependant on the other, develop, and they emerge from the house after three years. The house and the design are one at this point, "that design impervious and unremovable, becomes the shelter in which he lives, the sanctuary he can never abandon" lest he be exposed to the "unbearable maelstrom of reality" (Weinstein 185).

Without bringing his design into being, he could not establish his new identity, and would be trapped in the "moment of exposure, when the old identity collapses and the new one has yet to be forged" (Weinstein 185). Before the house is built and Ellen is moved in like the furniture, to sanction the design and give it both respectability and possibility, (since it would not be possible to found a dynasty without a mother—though, unfortunately, Sutpen never sees the integral part played by the feminine in his design).

Sutpen is a man without origins; even his name is not certainly known (AA 14-16, 33). He is initially signified by the objects he brings with him; the guns, the horse, the wild Negroes and French architect, and later by what he does; builds the house, invites the men out, fights with his wild Negroes, rides his horse and hunts the architect. Once the design is in place, however, he becomes Sutpen, referred to as Sutpen and bestows his name on both his House and his house — on his legitimate family that is.

Having established an identity based on his design, a design he conceived in relation to Pettibone, he becomes Pettibone, using his house as a binary line, dividing the outside(r) from the inside(r) according to Sutpen's ordering system, the very system which left the boy Sutpen standing outside the closed door, trying desperately to keep himself from shattering. Sutpen doesn't build in search of meaning, he builds to codify meaning, to contain and objectify it. This is not the purpose of meaningful space, and eventually the house, as spirit, as sentient being, evolves its own meaning as shelter for the other, in direct contrast to Sutpen's design and subverting his desire for sanctuary.¹⁷

In terms of phenomenological architecture, the archetype of the home-as-sanctuary is the First Roof archetype¹⁸:

the spatial pattern suggested by intuitions of roof form has its origins in the past, in the very dawn of architecture...this pattern [of dwelling] is the womb of space...shaped to make people feel as though they occupy or are gathered around the center of their world. (Silverstein 77)

The archetypes which shape architecture reflect an understanding of the home as a place of wholeness, in which "the fragments of our experience are brought together and made whole...by this form" (Silverstein 79).

The form of the house, which is a First Roof pattern, is that of a "type of vessel, the function of which is to contain something and thereby split the world in two: to establish simultaneously an inside world which contains and an outside world which excludes" (Silverstein 83). This is Sutpen's reason for building: to split the world and place himself on the "right" side of the door. What he does not realize is that in doing so, he places himself in the realm of the feminine, a space of containment and inclusion, and leaves the "outside world which excludes." His very enterprise is an "outside" one, and

the interior space of the house, rather than offering him a sanctuary in which enact his scenes of exclusion and silencing, expels him.

The outside/inside dialectic is primary to a person's understanding of self and world, and representative of being/non-being in as much as we confer spatiality upon thought (Bachelard 212). Inside, we are contained, and experience "our container as a hollow, concave space." We are "out of the disorder of the world, [in] a safe place...sheltered," in short, interior space is a sanctuary, a womb of "closeness and intensity" (Silverstein 71-73).

From the outside, however, the house appears as a "solid mass in silhouette rising up along a vertical axis...a steady urgent energy pushing up," and depends on "verticality" (Bachelard 17), rising upward and virtually penetrating the sky. From the inside, the house is womb (feminine), but from the outside, it is distinctly phallic, masculine. Thus, when Sutpen builds his house, it appears to him as a reflection of his masculinity, but when he goes inside, he sees no mirror of himself. The phallic representation disappears the moment he passes through the door, and he finds himself suddenly in a feminine space.

I would suggest that this is the reason for the tension in American Literature, between the themes of settling as being desirable, housebuilding and forging civilization out of the wilderness, and the idea of the hero as homeless nomad "lighting out for the territory," staying "on the road" and avoiding the "feminizing" aspect of civilization.

Building the house and keeping house are two fundamentally different endeavors, and upon having built, the man is reluctant to enter the feminine womb-space of the

interior, which, looking on the phallic façade of the house, he didn't know existed. So, like Sutpen, he realizes that the house, at least from the inside, is not really his space at all. Sutpen knows he is excluded from the house's "design" and when he returns from the war, he is relegated to only the parts of the house that are associated with decay, and to the buildings and structures that are scattered around the "big house".

Sutpen's misuse of the house is related, of course, to his exclusion and suppression of the other. Throughout the text he denies being to others—denies Judith both husband and brother, denies her even the knowledge of why and how her world came to be so empty; denies Henry a timely explanation which enables the connection between the "brothers" to deepen, leaving Henry isolated, without home, family or birthright, without identity or its physical manifestation, sanctuary; denies Bon his name, recognition, the family from which he comes (Sutpen) and the family he could have had with Judith; denies Ellen her personhood, denies Clytie his touch (throughout, but especially noticeable when he returns from the war) and legitimacy, though she is clearly a Sutpen. He denies Rosa the status of wife and mother, leaving her "embattled" in her virginity, growing old as a child, never having been a woman. And he denies the meaning of place, the *genius loci*, the spirit of Sutpen's Hundred, a presence acknowledged by everyone, even the ever-rational Mr. Compson. His utter denial of these others and their spatial representation is what dooms him.

Once the action of building is accomplished, Sutpen's connection with the house essentially ends. It becomes "not a dwelling but a possessed object, wanted and had, but not loved" (Ruzicka 52). This describes the house as well as the families of Thomas

Sutpen. His house, once built, *and* with all its doors and windows in place to clearly mark the division between outside/inside, public/private, and marks the change in his social status.

Marilyn Chandler notes that the windows and doors come fairly late to the house, and I think this suggests in some way that Sutpen was still evolving, was for awhile whole within the space of the house.¹⁹ His evolution into a "Pettibone" comes when he hangs the doors and puts glass in the windows, after which he acquires the "furniture and the wife." At this point, then, his design and his identity become firmly fixed.

When he returns from the War, though, he finds that though he may own the house, it has ceased to belong to him in any meaningful way. The house itself seems to cast him out. In his absence, it has become a foreign space, a space of subversion where Ellen goes on making plans for Judith and Charles' wedding after Sutpen knows who Charles Bon is and that the marriage cannot take place. His conversation with Henry takes place in the house, in the library in fact, and this confrontation leads to Henry's repudiation of home and birthright (AA 18). His later conversation with Henry takes place during the war, in the exterior, public world of men, and Sutpen is successful in communicating his design to Henry *only* at this point, outside the space of the house.

Bringing the tombstone into the house and placing it in the hall—the hall where later Rosa and Clytie will have their confrontation and where Quentin will recognize the "scion" Jim Bond²⁰ —is an attempt to re-insert himself. The stone is obviously a signifier of Sutpen, called the Colonel during the war as he totes it around, into battle and through the masculine space of the war and the outdoors. Bringing it inside is a strategical

maneuver to recapture his territory.²¹ The stone is a public monument brought into a private space, and represents an attempt on Sutpen's part to redefine the interior space of his house.

But the interior cannot be reclaimed by Sutpen, and the house itself refuses to acquiesce to him. After the war, he is relegated to one room and to wandering in the decayed and rotten parts of his property. The parts that belong to him are the static and ruined parts, the fields and orchards, the skeleton of the house, its exterior details. Sutpen's design was too rigid, static.

Stasis, in this novel and its (pre)text, is kin to death: both the narrator in "Evangeline" and Quentin (both while visiting the "airless" and still spaces of Rosa's house and the upstairs bedroom where Henry lays dying) associate the "dim," "stale," "airless," spaces which they describe as "dead rooms" with "tomblake air," with "the odor of stale and unwashed flesh and of death" (Evangeline 61, AA 373), linking death and stasis.

Sutpen's static design likewise produces death of bodies and a kind of "death-in-life" for Sutpen himself, isolating him from the interconnectedness that the other characters recognize. His static adherence to his design and its foundational ideology lead to his physical death as well, and the total destruction of the House of Sutpen. In the end, though he "conceived" and "without gentleness begot" the House/house, though he called it forth out of the "primordial," "alluvial," "miasma" and the "spirit-ridden forests" and then took refuge in it like a womb waiting for his identity to gestate and be complete, appropriating it as both mother and child, but in all ways, as feminine body, in the end the

house does not offer him sanctuary. Sutpen is the only member of his family *not* to die inside "his" house.

Sutpen dies outside, spilling his blood into the very land, the tranquil and astonished earth he violated to build the house and incubate his design. And he dies at the hands of one who represents the means by which he accomplished the building and subsequent founding of a new identity, one who represents exactly the Other against which Thomas Sutpen set himself in order to define himself as One, Wash Jones.

Of all the characters in the novel, Wash is "the man who mirrors Sutpen's own origins" (Porter 152), the character most like the original Thomas Sutpen, a boy whose identity was destroyed upon the realization of his being inessential, irrevocably other; Wash comes to this same realization through Sutpen. "In denying Jones the social recognition he demands and deserves, Sutpen brings his own life to a violent end and provokes Jones himself to suicide and the massacre of his offspring, as a result of the realization that there is no place for him..." (Porter 152) in a world where a man of Jones' own "otherness" can turn into Pettibone and violently close out the other who is most like him. Wash is both destroyed (as the boy Sutpen was) and becomes destroyer (as the man Thomas Sutpen became). He experiences the evolution that took years for Sutpen to complete in a matter of moments. Sutpen is killed by the ideology he internalized at the moment of the slamming of Pettibone's door and the irrevocable, unmovable design that moment inspired.

Similarly, the house, as a space of the Other existing within a system that makes use of the Other only by dominating and subordinating it in order to define the One, and

because it is a part of Sutpen's flawed design, must collapse. The house was, from the first, the structure on which the design was "without gentleness begot." Raised out of the earth in an act of violation and violence, its skeleton constructed on the faulty foundation of a patriarchal ordering system, a system existing to codify and pass off as natural a system of division and domination, the house is destroyed by the other inside it. The spirit of the place, the genius loci, is a silent and violated one, a spirit conscious of its own constructed difference, conscious of having been separated out and set apart, objectified and robbed of access to language, a presence not a person; in a word, Clytie.

Clytie Sutpen, more a Sutpen than any other, a site of division and difference in terms of race and gender and a visible sign of Sutpen's hypocrisy, seen by some critics as representative of the "dark" aspect of Sutpen-ness, is more her father's child than any other. Furthermore, the fact that she has no visible mother, is not even given a memory of her mother and whose mother has no name, (curiously similar to Thomas Sutpen's absent mother) makes her solely a product of Sutpen.

Like the house, she is begotten by Sutpen upon the body of the Other—a feminine body, ravaged, wild and without words. The house is a product of the labor of the wild Negroes; she is born through the labor of one of the same wild Negroes. Like Clytie, the house is a presence, a silent space and the keeper of Sutpens and Sutpen memories, waiting for someone, "Henry, perhaps, to emerge from some door which knew his touch, his hand on the knob, the weight of his foot on a sill which knew that weight" (AA 140). The house is as necessary to his design as Clytie is to its destruction.

When the "outside world which excludes," threatens to leak into the interior with

all its repressive and exploitive tendencies, Clytie, as representative and even the spirit of place on Sutpen's Hundred, must destroy the house. If the outside/inside division is breached, the house will cease to be the dwelling place of the other and become just another dilapidated old plantation house, (and Southern Literature is full of those, often functioning as metaphors for the collapse of the Old South and its myths). "[T]o dwell...means to remain at peace within the... free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature" (Heidegger 149).

To be a dwelling, the house must act as sanctuary for the other , safeguarding its nature by preserving silence and inclusion. Faulkner understood the idea of sanctuary--characters as diverse as Joe Christmas, Temple Drake and of course Thomas Sutpen, mistake mere buildings for sanctuaries, and fall victim to unspeakable violence as a result. Clytie makes no such mistake. She destroys the house, which has become a mere skeleton, with loose boards and windows that are only frames. She recognizes that, like herself, it is unable to protect anyone anymore.

The house was ripped from the earth and in the end, collapses back into it, leaving only the crumbling foundation to stand and tell its tale--how once a man "tore violently a plantation," built it on a flawed foundation of exploitation and exclusionary systems of meaning, and ultimately accomplished nothing. The space of the other still privileges silence, though it is no longer housed. Its dwelling is in nature, from which the house was torn and to which it has returned.

The binarisms have been inverted; nature, not civilization; silence, not sound, remains. In the final pages of *Absalom, Absalom!*, sound has lost its ability to represent.

The howling figure of Jim Bond cannot be caught or even located: "They could hear him; he didn't ever seem to get any further away... in time, they could not even locate the direction anymore of the howling" (376).

The spirit of the house speaks silently throughout the text,²² and its words belong to the Other/others who inhabit the space, who dwell there and die there, all of them, in the second story; "an echo spoke which was not mine but rather that of the irrevocable might-have-been which haunts all houses, all enclosed walls erected by human hands, not for shelter, not for warmth, but to hide from the world's curious looking and seeing ..." (AA 137).

The irrevocable might-have-been, the untold stories and possibilities that Sutpen's design mortified into silence and stasis found a dwelling place in the house, but would (Clytie fears) now be cast out of the sanctuary and exposed to the looking and seeing of a world that will see only objects and hear only silence. This exposure would be unbearable, and death is ultimately the only sanctuary for the other in a system that has no place for its difference, and will not make room. This is why Clytie burns the house with herself and Henry inside; to preserve a sanctuary for otherness. The unvoiced, unbodied other, she requires neither language nor touch, and the house is ultimately just a decaying skeleton constructed around a vacancy, an empty space.

Like Poe, Faulkner is presenting a picture of a world in flux. Ideologies are being called into question, foundational ordering systems questioned, but in both the narrative present and the authors' present, there is not yet an alternative system in place. When characters in American literature are alone in questioning their cultural assumptions and

seeking to subvert them, they frequently end up realizing that to do so requires a radical act, in which the interior (self) preserves its integrity, even as the exterior (either the body or the conditions of the life of the character) is destroyed. Edna Pointellier's suicide, Sethe's murder of her "beloved" daughter and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* are all examples of the "potentially viable responses one can make to inevitable exposure to the *unbearable maelstrom of reality*." Clytie's destruction of the house falls into the category of such responses, an attempt to avoid being destroyed by systems that advocate subordination and silencing.

When the interior of the house is violated by the entry of outsiders, Clytie realizes that the outside/inside division has been breached, that the One has crossed into the space of the Other. In this narrative, there is no chance that these divisions can become fruitful mergers; if the One is crossing into the realm of Other in Yoknapatawpha County, it's not stopping by to say howdy.

If the outside world enters the house, it will destroy the space of the Other, so that the second story which resides there will be expelled, not into speech and empathy, but into a world where it will be utterly and violently lost. To avoid this loss of sanctuary, the house had better to burn, to collapse in on itself, folding in protectively around its silent and suppressed story.

Ultimately, this protects the Other from being expelled into a world where it will be enslaved and dominated, torn apart and fragmented, distorted and recognizable only by its scars, like Sethe recognizes her M'am in Morrison's *Beloved*. Clytie is ultimately a protective mother, a mother like Sethe who deals death to preserve her offspring from a

fate worse than death, the fate of being irrevocably Other in a world without empathy or sanctuary. Clytie "appears in that window from which she must have been watching the gates constantly day and night for three months—a tragic gnomes face beneath the clean headrag, against a red background of fire...looking down at them, perhaps not even now with triumph and no more of despair than it had worn, possibly even serene above the melting clapboards" (AA 376). She is serene, silently watching as she has always done, and will always do.

Like a rememory, the spirit will linger long after the structure is destroyed and the actions all accomplished, and the story it contains will wait in that place for someone to walk into it and maybe re-vision it. The death of Clytie Sutpen and the destruction of the house are redemptive acts, laying claim to the space of their stories.

The true tragedy is the howling figure of Jim Bond, lurking, hiding in the ruins of his heritage, not silent, but inarticulate, trying desperately to tell a story in a wordless, not-language that no one even tries to comprehend, a figure exposed and utterly other in a world—inexplicable, incomprehensible and unbearable—lost and without sanctuary.

For Faulkner, the other must be encountered in its own terms, speaking its own language. He knows that he cannot authentically tell some stories, that he cannot account for some things, and he turns to silence because it is "...a mask or surface of a receptive species of reticence, relinquishing judgement, acknowledging failure...in the quiet that tentatively awaits the possibility of the redemption of ambiguity. What is glimpsed in this redemption is the flash of the impossibility of comprehension" (Babich 87). *Absalom, Absalom!* is about this impossibility.

The stories of the others cannot be comprehended, and because of this, the narrative cannot tell the whole story. We are left with only half-truths, ambiguities and conjecture. Babich's argument about Heidegger's silence regarding Nazism could also be made of Faulkner's silence when confronting the stories of the other in the South, particularly relative to race issues; "silence confesses...his past and lifelong guilt, or, abysmally, the horror to which his silence has given consent" (Babich 88). Implicated by his heritage, the violent history between the One and the Other in the South of his past and of his present (numerous lynchings took place in the late '20s and '30s, two right in Faulkner's town of Oxford), silence is his confession and atonement. Both authors note the limits of language and point to silence as the mode in which the past is "ever newly manifest in the guilty return of the obliterated" (Babich 88).

Faulkner recognizes that his narratives of the South and its history are haunted by such ghosts, returning from years of repression and exclusion, and speaking in a language he doesn't fully understand. He carefully carves out space in his narratives for their stories, frames them meticulously, so that even the uncaring reader can see their outline and form, and recognize like Mr. Compson that the narrative is missing something, the very something that would make it cohere, would make sense of it all. And then he steps back and himself listens to the silence, and readies himself as well as his cosmos for the "redemption that waits in the flash of stilling grace" (Babich 102).

CHAPTER TWO: ROBERT PENN WARREN

"ALL THAT SLIDING AND BROKENNESS OF THINGS":

LOCATING THE SELF IN SPACE AND STORY

*"Out of the silence, the saying.
Into the silence, the said. Thus
Silence, in Timelessness, gives forth
Time, and receives it again, and I lie
In darkness"*

— Robert Penn Warren

As we have seen, Warren suggests that Faulkner "work[s] in terms of polarities, oppositions, paradoxes, inversions of roles...[and] employ[s] a line of concealed (or open) dialectic progression as a principle for his fiction." We might now turn to Warren's own work with the same questions in mind. The system¹ of difference and privileging that results in constructs and enforced division discussed relative to Faulkner is shown to be equally destructive in Warren's works, and the latter also uses the symbol/something else of the ruined mansion to explore themes of structured absence, similar to those of *Absalom, Absalom!*. In *Flood* Warren explores the idea of discursive space, the relationship between telling and silence, the limits of language to convey truth and the way in which dwelling authentically in the house is a metaphor for dwelling authentically in the self.

One focus of this text is the discovery of self. In particular, the narrative explores how the ability to abide the true self is equated with the ability to abide *in* the self. Communication is the way in which one can escape solitary confinement. Whether one is confined by the Fiddler house or the pen, by the Spottwood mansion or the asylum, spaces posited as thematically parallel in the texts, the key to escape from imprisonment in the self is to recognize the difference between a true and a false telling. The redemption to be found in telling can only come true for those who tell "not the false, but the true story." But the telling is only a part of the circuit of discourse, the ultimate aim of which is to arrive at *le silence du bonheur*, where you neither have to tell or not tell .

The Fiddler house is a space with many uses, but primarily for my purposes, it is a sanctuary, a shell, a space of silence, and a metaphor for language itself. Like the house, language is a structure in which absence is bounded. Just as a house encloses space and gives it boundaries, so does language enclose thoughts. Words frame silences just as walls frame and shape rooms .

As in *Absalom, Absalom!*, the houses in *Flood* and *Meet Me in the Green Glen* are linked to language. They house many stories, only some of which have been gathered together. The rest exist in a state of gestation, "not yet ready to be plucked" (*F* 131). Brad, for example, never asks Maggie about the events of October 5, preferring to read the trial records and visit the pen. Cassie's confession is ignored by the court and Angelo executed in spite of it, as if she had never spoken. Like the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the characters in Warren's texts often ignore the fact that the women have authentic stories to tell. These missing narrative threads would provide the missing pieces

to these fragmented stories. The stories narrated by and from the subjective perspective of the male characters are replete with absences and gaps and silences that go beyond the text to implicate the society that produced them. And like the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Brad, the narrator/author of Fiddlersburg ignores his most significant source, preferring to shut himself up in his rooms while she shares her story with Yasha. The court too ignores the testimony of Cassie Spottwood, even though she was the only witness to her husband's murder.

Yasha Jones comes to know Fiddlersbug as irreducible, inexpressible, a zone of human truth beyond language or even beautiful moving pictures. I would argue that what Leonard Casper says of Brad is more (or at least first) true of Yasha, "He submits to the possibility that 'the secret and irrational life of men,' all that remains mute or inexplicable, may constitute human truth" (Casper 18). Yasha, like Lettice Poindexter before him, comes to Fiddlersburg and is reborn, for "quiet Fiddlersburg, about to buried under water, is...a metaphorical womb to which Yasha, Brad, Maggie, Cal and others return not for entombment but for rebirth" (Casper 43).

But it isn't Fiddlersburg at large that acts in this way, it is specifically the Fiddler house, and its parallel, the penitentiary, that gestate the rebirth of these characters. The use of space and silence, and the positing of a female subjectivity in *Flood* make it significant for this study, and position it in an interesting conversation with the later *Meet Me in the Green Glen*. The Spottwood mansion of the latter text can be seen as similar to both Sutpen's Hundred and, to a lesser extent, the Fiddler house. Rather than focusing on the nature and causes of silence, in this text Warren shows us the destructive power of

silencing and its relationship to the patriarchal enterprises of division and domination, and thus "a different kind of silence, of virtual existential shock, permeates *Meet Me in the Green Glen*" (Casper 19). Also significant is the relationship between Maggie and Cassie. Maggie is one of Warren's most articulate women, but she is never awarded full subjectivity. Cassie, on the other hand, gains full access to voice only to find that hers is a voice and language easily dismissed, hers a story easily (dis)(re)membered in the patriarchal realm of the court, Parkerton, the Spottwood Valley, Tennessee, the South.

As discussed earlier, the patriarchal ideology that built both America in general² and the South in particular is a divisive one. In Warren, the binary slash is the line of fragmentation that prohibits true being, for where can such a fragmenting of self begin but with the primary division of Self/Other, a division represented spatially as the outside/inside division?³ The fragmentation produced by dialectical divisions within the characters, what Warren refers to as self-division, is the primary source of conflict and tension in his late novels. For Warren, the true self is the integrated self, the individual who overcomes self-division by undertaking the quest for identity and, as Eisinger suggests, "struggle[s] darkly with the disparate elements of [his or her] character...to shuck off mask after mask and come to the quintessential self" (Eisinger 14). Moreover, "the mystery of self reappear[s] in the mystery of others, to whom, in one's incompleteness, one turns," and thus it is only through love, the "true connection to one's immanent self, as otherness dissolves" (Casper 56), that the quest for true being can be accomplished. This quest appears in *Flood* as the yearning to tell a true story and thus experience its *coming true*, which is to say letting its truth emerge rather than imposing

an idea or scheme of values already articulated in the teller's mind⁴. In both novels, the ability to truly love is inexorably linked to the ability to truly be, and it is through the articulation of these truths that the divided self can be reborn as an authentic self.⁵

And therein lies the problem; traditional Western thought divides the natural dualisms into a binary system of hierarchical oppositions, and in so doing, imposes numerous prohibitions to "coming true," or the evolution of the self that results in true being.⁶ In Warren's philosophy, the division between self and other is crippling.⁷ Indeed, Warren often takes as a main theme the need for duality without division, the *coming-closeness* that must take place between seemingly disparate entities: self and other, self and world, art and reality. As Lettice tells Maggie, "...you have to make your *you* out of all that sliding brokenness of things (*F* 273) His characters must undertake the quest for meaning in continuities and in the assimilation of the self with the world outside it, recognizing the dual, not divided, nature of things.

Flood and *Meet Me in the Green Glen* share many similarities: their use of structured absence in the form of textual and even extra-textual silences; the prevalence of spatial metaphor; the importance of love for the redemption of the individual. And while Faulkner's "house divided" is destroyed by fire, both the Fiddler house and the Spottwood mansion are ultimately destroyed by water.⁸ Water, "because it can be fluid or solid, provides Warren with special access to all of life's dualities" (Casper 43). Moreover, water can be both a life-giving and a life-destroying element. The river in *Flood* also functions as an allusion to the stream of human life and emotions, which can both sustain a person or carry him/her away, similar to the river that flows past the island

in Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," a poem quoted by both Yasha and Brad, the central themes of which are highly significant in an analysis of Brad's own character. One critic of the poem writes:

The stream in the poem is not merely a river that runs by the island of Shalott but it is also symbolic of the stream of human life and emotion that bypasses the Lady and leaves her emotionally isolated. The current of this same stream later "[bears] her far away" from her land of shadows, not only physically, but in a figurative sense as well. (Hoth 2)

Both texts contain characters who are either cut off from or overwhelmed by their emotions, memories and/or imaginations. Though the characters come to quite different ends, the texts are thematically linked by their very special and pointed use of space and silence as the means of dealing with the drought or flood experienced within each individual. Ultimately, both are concerned with redemption and the ways in which our world is really all of one piece.

Flood: A Romance for Our Time (1964)

Katrin Meise in her article entitled "On Talking about Silence in Conversation and Literature," reformulates Wittgenstein's well-known dictum, "What we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence," in a way I find especially appropriate for a discussion of Robert Penn Warren's 1964 *Flood: A Romance of our Time*. With respect to both conversation and literature, Meise rewrites Wittgenstein as "What we pass over in silence, we must speak about" (Meise 46). This seems to hold true for most of the central characters in *Flood*, particularly the Tollivers, but also their (former and future) spouses.

Silence is central to representing the losses and lacks in *Flood*, and the Fiddler house is the locus of silence in the text. Moreover, the house is a “metaphor for interiority (in the sense of selfhood)” (Romero 21) and acts as a sanctuary, where the characters withdraw to re-collect the pieces of themselves that have been shattered by the events of their lives. Silence is in fact a space carved out in the words of the text, framed and enclosed, just as the interior of the house is a space enclosed by a form.

Physical space and textual space, or silence, bear a close relationship, the nuances of which differ from one author and even from one work to another, but they bear particular significance in this text due to the attention directed at the professional artist. For Brad, a writer, silence has unique implications, and because it “serves as the portal to metaphors of imagination” (Bachelard ix), the house also bears on him in intense and often paradoxical ways.

Certainly Warren's work is dominated by ontological concerns, so pursuing the ontological significance of space and silences in this text seems worthwhile. My focus is on the way in which Warren seeks to achieve a total representation of “the slow evolution of ...solidarity-becoming-salvation” by bringing silence itself into the circuit of discourse. As Leonard Casper has observed, “Warren tried to be true to the solitariness of his central characters while demonstrating that they are not alone in their loneliness and, furthermore, that some degree of their sense of isolation and nonbeing is self-imposed and reversible (Casper 16).

One way Warren highlights this is to allow silence, the language of isolation and nonbeing, to speak for itself. Brad's "beautiful little book", *I'm Telling You Now* appeals

to Yasha Jones in part because they share a compulsion to revisit the past. Yasha voices this as a conviction that one must return to the past so that "all that has happened [t]here...will flow into ...feeling....and you will stand in the end in...*le silence du bonheur*. And in that silence, you will make a beautiful thing" (221). Throughout the text, the relationship between telling and silence is consistently highlighted. Significantly, though, as in Faulkner and Morrison, it is Warren's female characters who are most successful in manifesting that relationship correctly, and thus moving beyond the house and all that it represents for them.

In one way, the house functions as a protective womb-space, though it is not always interpreted as such, especially by Brad who sees it as being "filled" with emptiness, darkness and silence, a space he cannot navigate. Like so many male characters in American literature — Poe's narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher," *Absalom, Absalom!*'s Thomas Sutpen and, as we will see in the next chapter, *Beloved*'s Paul D. — Brad perceives the house as a prison. Like Cal Fiddler's who has attempted escape from the actual penitentiary situated opposite the Fiddler house above the river, Brad been unable to escape from Fiddlersburg.

And, like Sunder Spottwood of *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, Brad is paralyzed inside the house, though his paralysis is emotional and/or creative rather than physical, like Sunder's. Just as images of Sunder in his vitality focus on him outside the house, for example, riding his horse on the grounds, images of Brad as a vital artist, capable of creating the "beautiful moving picture" Yasha expects of him, focus on his activities outside the house: wandering the town, as in the scene by the Confederate monument,

visiting the pen, driving his car, eating in the diner. Inside the house, however, Brad is virtually inert, often seen lying on his back in bed, standing virtually motionless beside the window or incapacitated by alcohol, sleep and the “shadows of the unrecollected” that haunt him wordlessly in the dark bedrooms of the Fiddler house.

It is, of course, his own past that haunts him because “thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed” (Bachelard 8). Brad does not want to be at home with his memories; much of his storytelling is in fact aimed at changing rather than recollecting the past. Even his title story in *I’m Telling You Now* is an improved version of reality, an attempt to compensate for his own guilt over NOT telling Izzie Goldfarb (or any of his “fathers” for that matter) goodbye.⁹ When he does abide in the house alone for too long, his memories begin to emerge without the authorial filter he usually subjects them to, as in the memory of his father’s funeral, a memory firmly situated in the library of the Fiddler house. In fact, so firmly is it situated there that he is able to escape it simply by closing a few (literal and figurative) doors: “Then he remembered that that episode in the dark library was, too, something to be stowed away. It was to be put in the back of the dark closet. A man just couldn’t go around remembering everything” (172). Interestingly, Brad, like Warren, imagines memory as contained in space and suitably relegated to darkness.

To remember is for Brad “..a drowning, an eternal drowning, a perpetual suffocation, a crushing weight on the chest that would never go away” (18) and part of his reluctance to enter the house and inability to function creatively inside it is because the very memories he most wants to avoid, having occurred there, are unavoidable

within its walls: “The unconscious abides. Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are” (Bachelard 7). This is, I think, a fine definition of what Toni Morrison calls *rememory*, and bears witness to the relationship between space/place and the human imagination/memory.

For Faulkner, Warren and Morrison, memories exist in space more than in time, and the texts under consideration in this study all attest to the impact of space on the poetic imagination. Spatial metaphor is especially important then, in dealing with those characters who by profession or temperament might be thought poetic or at the least artistic. In the case of *Flood*, this points us not only to Brad, but also to the movie producer Yasha Jones, the artist Lettice Poindexter and more ambiguously to Maggie Tolliver, who turns out to be a better storyteller than her brother, if the telling of stories aims at their *coming true* rather than a mere proliferation of words aimed at concealing or at least disguising their truth(s).

For Maggie, the house functions as a shell into which she necessarily and, as it turns out, wisely withdraws. The real significance of the metaphor of the inhabited shell in Maggie’s case is the relationship it enables us to develop between Warren’s spatial metaphors, particularly Bachelard’s metaphor of the house as inhabited shell, and the circuit of discourse operating in *Flood*.

By successfully completing the circuit of discourse established in the text, Maggie is able to both truly love, and through this, to truly be. As mentioned earlier, this text is very specifically concerned with “telling” and the importance of telling a story in a way

that allows it to come true, and thereby, through the sharing of such true stories, one enters into communion with others, which is necessary in Warren's view, for salvation.

Because it is so important, we might take a moment to analyze the process by which all this may occur. The circuit of discourse that recognizes silence proceeds from *fore-silence* to *utterance* to *after-silence*, and then if the utterance was a true revelation of self, *deep silence*, what is referred to in the text as the *silence du bonheur*, descends.

The Fiddler house acts as a physical space through which this circuit can be achieved. It acts as a space for the re-collection of the past, a coming to terms with and piecing together of the self. In order to arrive at the deep silence, the "beautiffulness," one must pass *through* the silence to the telling, as if passing through a room or a house. Having lived through the events, Maggie then retreats to the sanctuary of the house and of silence, then, when she is ready, she speaks abruptly and definitively and only once¹⁰, similar in this way to Judith Sutpen, Rosa Coldfield, Cassie Spottwood and Denver in *Beloved*. Speaking after silence is a way of letting the story come true; the true story can only be told after the silence that explores the "mysterious inwardness".

Interestingly, very little conversation takes place inside the intimate spaces of the Fiddler house; most talking is done in the garden or in the public spaces of the patio, downstairs hall and parlor. The upstairs rooms are quiet, meditative. Lettice builds a studio there, Yasha reads, Brad lies on the bed and thinks. Maggie instinctively understands the relationship between the house and her own coming true, and withdraws there to piece herself back together. Significantly, she will tell her story in the garden, not

in the house, and will then have to leave the house and the grounds entirely to consummate her relationship with Yasha.

Maggie's redemptive monologue, coming after years of silence in the Fiddler house, is the definitive utterance, the coming true of Maggie. Her story stands out not only against the background of her own silence, but of her brother's continued silence. The importance of her story is foregrounded by the silences that surround it. To understand the relationship between silence and story in this text, Dauenhauer's phenomenological discussion of utterance is useful:

If one focuses on utterance as a whole...he [or she] notices that the utterance is surrounded by a fringe of silence. This is the fore-and-after silence....fore-silence and after-silence primordially show themselves as constituting the framing for a determinate utterance....Silence is the background against which a story stands out... (Dauenhauer 10).

Maggie's silence defines her story, and her emergence from the house is concomitant with her emergence from silence. The Fiddler house sheltered her silence, enabled her to *become* and when she did emerge, it was into a true telling. This telling is her way of entering into the fellowship of humanity, and opening herself up to love through the intimacy of sharing her true story/self with Yasha. In this state, she is able to complete the circuit of discourse, for "...deep silence can occur only if some utterance is associated with it" (Dauenhauer 16), or as Yasha Jones puts it, in order to arrive at the *silence du bonheur*, you have to come out on the other side of what has happened. Then "the time will come when there'll be no need to tell what happened – or need not to tell it. You'll be free then...what you have here now is not freedom in a beyondness of what happened. Nor is it a plunge into what happened in order to find freedom..." (F 287).

Throughout the text, arrival at this type of silence is posited as the ultimate objective of the artist, but whether or not Brad achieves this is a matter of critical speculation and will be addressed at the end of this section.

Each characters' silence also frames the story of another, with the silence mostly emanating from Brad. His silences act as catalysts for events, but his false tellings create an even greater emptiness and act as *impacted structured absences*, leaving the events of October 5 uncertain.¹¹ Brad's description of the events of that night, "in its refusal to engage with the past ("the shadow of the unrecollected") is a model of self-deception and facile handling" (Ferriss 101). Maggie's text is in direct contrast to this, a "complex and realistic confession by a woman who heaps responsibility for the past onto herself, though she cannot quite articulate the nature of her responsibility" (Ferriss 102).

The conversation between Maggie and Yasha provides some strong passages for the analysis of the circuit of discourse, as well as an understanding, by contrast, of Brad's inability to tell his story and emerge into true being. Their conversation begins with her observation that Brad's nervousness is due to a fear of being left alone with her, and

when she had said those words, it was as though she had released some chord, some hold, that had kept her from sinking entirely into that dark medium of silence....But Yasha Jones thought there was no last backward appeal on that sinking glimmer of a face...[he] knew that she was withdrawing triumphantly into the medium that was more truly her own than that upper air of bright confusion. (F 160)

For Maggie, silence is related to inner peace. It is recognizably her medium, but at this point, it is definitely not the medium of Yasha Jones who was also "sinking into a silence, into the deep medium of himself, which, he suddenly felt, was shadowy and shifting, suffocating..." Silence becomes, like memory, analogous to the water that will

soon flood the town. Yasha at first envies but then comes to truly listen to Maggie, unlike Brad who is unable to see her except in relation to himself and so perceives her as a living reminder and even accusation of his wrongdoings. Yasha realizes that her ability to “stand being herself and therefore stand being with herself” enable her to experience authentic saying, to let things come true even through the medium of silence.

Through Maggie, Yasha comes to experience his own silent recollection of the past as a transformative medium from which he can emerge to love and (pro)create. Brad, by total contrast, cannot bear silence—it leads him neither inward nor toward greater understanding of self but rather feels like the catalyst for complete destruction. When Maggie tries tactfully and subtly to silence him, he responds, “I feel myself exploding silently...I feel the Me exploding silently into the non-Me” (*F* 161) and is unable to see that this explosion is a necessary component for his salvation, that to enter the circuit of discourse and emerge to share such truth as you can know with human community is the best we can hope for.

As Cal puts it, when you come to now something that is true and beautiful, “then you have to find a way to say it....You see, when you learn something like this, you have to say it” (*F* 343). For Warren, the relationship of the individual to the world and to the human community are major themes, and the ability to communicate is at the heart of the divisions and heartbreaks that these characters face and which can only be escaped or made right by the sharing of true stories.

Yasha, on the other hand, responds to Maggie by opening himself up, and their relationship then depends on their mutually arrived at conclusion that “You have to tell

the truth...the time comes when you have to if...you want to exist" (*F* 161). Both understand that truth is arrived at silently and inwardly, but must then be shared in order to bring its bearer into fellowship with others and the world at large. For Warren, it is not enough to know the truth, one must also tell it if one is to enter the "House of Forgiveness".

Forgiveness cannot be granted to the self by the self. No character of Warren's escapes the communal aspects of guilt and redemption, from Pretty Boy's tearful prayer to Brother Potts' hymn to Cal in the pen finally speaking his truth to Brad and thus purging himself of hate to Maggie's poignant letter asking Brad to be happy for her happiness and finally to Lettice's letter, these characters are redeemed through the telling of his or her own true story. To tell is to become, to enter into the fullness of being, emerging from the shell that has sheltered the coming true.

Shell creatures, such as the Fiddler crab, provide an interesting analogy to many of Warren's characters; "their obvious dynamism...lies in the fact that they come alive in the dialectics of what is hidden and what is manifest" (Bachelard 111). Likewise, the characters of *Flood* come alive in the dialectic of what is recollected silently and what is revealed through telling. The Fiddler house, like the shell of a Fiddler crab, functions as a space of sanctuary, and protects the inhabitant, enabling it to eventually outgrow the shell and move on, as we see with Lettice, Maggie and Yasha, and perhaps even with Brad, though his future is less certain. In terms of Bachelard's observations on the nature of those who inhabit the house as shell, Maggie seems an exemplar: "A creature that hides and "withdraws into its shell," is preparing a way out. If we remain at the heart of the

image under consideration, we have the impression that, by staying in the motionlessness of its shell, the creature is preparing temporal explosions, not to say whirlwinds, of being” (Bachelard 110). Certainly, Maggie emerges from the house a much different creature than when she first took refuge there. She enters the house for the specific purpose of gestating a new identity, or as she tells Yasha, “it was just what I had to do in order to be, in the end, myself. No, not to *be* me – to *become* me, if I could” (284).

Just as the human body can be seen as a shell that contains and protects the soul (or self), so too, the house is the shell that contains and protects the body. Thus, metaphors of the house are especially appropriate to represent the self. The fear of entering them, then, is seen to be a fear of looking at what Yasha Jones calls “the mysterious inwardness of life,” (113) and the inability to navigate them, a failure to navigate the self. Brad rarely navigates the Fiddler house soberly. To him, it is only a dark house full of rooms he never enters (we only actually see Brad enter four of the rooms in the house). He imagines it as a lonesome place, and cannot imagine why Maggie has stayed there so long. Like him, the house is “full of angry lonesomeness” (138), so full perhaps that he can’t navigate it at all without bumping up against the walls.

Presumably, Brad’s father, Lank Tolliver, felt similarly toward the house. Having wrested it away from the Fiddler’s in a distinctly “Sutpen-esque” or even Snopes-like way, Lank is unable to feel at home in the house, and flees to swamp to lay in the mud and cry, and eventually to take his own life. The house evokes a similar response in Brad, who tries several times to take ownership of it but always ends up feeling that it somehow owns him.

The Fiddler house and the state penitentiary are of course, parallel, as Brad is parallel to Cal Fiddler, and all that Mr. Budd says of solitary in the pen is as true of Brad's life as of any prisoner's, "It is the last lonesomeness. It is the kind of lonesomeness that a man can't stand, for he can't stand just being himself" (138). Cal perceptively tells Brad later that this is also the reason he (Brad) shies away from Fiddlersburg, "Because you're you in Fiddlersburg." Brad imagines, wrongly, that the house functions similarly for Maggie, but as Yasha Jones points out, Maggie "can stand it, and therefore is not lonesome...she is the kind of person who can stand herself and therefore can stand being with herself" (146). In this way, she is the antithesis of her brother, and it is for this reason that Brad perceives "Her whole way of being had been an accusation, louder than words. And worse, far worse than words, for words would specify. Her accusation, not specifying, therefore had been total" (325).

The phenomenology of the poetic imagination allows us to conceive of both a person and a house as "the surface that separates the region of the same from the region of the other,...and that in this zone of sensitized surface, before being, one must speak" (Bachelard 222). Lettice Poindexter speaks "without shame of her life," and seeks redemption through telling, even though both she and Maggie understand that telling is not just confession but also a penance and atonement, a way of "not letting yourself off easy" but rather "going back to suffer everything again to say it" (271). Brad, on the other hand, almost never recounts the events of his own past, except to engage in a kind of "creative non-fiction," using the events of his past to form humorous or heroic anecdotes, as in telling stories of his "musk-rat skinner" of a father and falsely accusing the late

Telford Lott of trying to make a Communist out of him. At this point, Brad “did not know that true shame is in yearning for the false, not the true, story” (63), and it is only the false story that he pursues after writing *I’m Telling you Now*. Interestingly, after he “had special success at a party in Malibu” with his Telford Lott story, “[h]e could not bear to enter the dark house” (58) and so fell asleep on the lawn.

For Brad, any house he encounters is likely to be perceived as a “dark house”, and he cannot enter them at moments of his greatest shame because he doesn’t want to be alone in the silence of that space with himself. When he rises from the lawn after this episode, “he entered the house and went properly to bed. He never mentioned the name Telford Lott again” (58). Instead of encountering himself in the silence of the house, and then emerging from it to tell a true story, he simply never speaks the name again, and Telford Lott becomes another of the “shadows of the unrecollected” that haunt him. Ultimately, though, as we will see later, Brad prefers the company of these shadows, which he can escape simply by leaving the house, to the reality of what he has become.

By contrast, Lettice and Maggie feel no such compulsion. In fact, theirs is the opposite compulsion — each feels compelled to tell her story after having spent time in the silence of recollection, and each tells in the spirit of offering her self up without reservation, enabling both characters to fulfill the circuit of discourse and the course toward true being.

From the beginning of their relationship, Lettice enacts a ritual of telling Brad the story of herself. For her, this is a form of intimacy, which Brad is glad to receive, but reluctant to reciprocate. He meets Lettice during the early days of his success as a writer,

having just written his first book. *I'm Telling You Now* turns out to be the only true telling that Brad can muster. He will be consistently unable to duplicate the feat in writing or in the course of his love relationships, and therefore unable to achieve the success he desires as a writer and unable to engage in intimacy on any level. This is most evident in his relationship with Lettice.

The reasons for his initial attraction to her and the fact that she is an artist are both significant and reappear as themes in Brad's own development. He is, he admits, awed by her; in particular "by a sense of inner freedom that the girl seemed to possess" (*F* 58) and he goes on to equate this inner freedom with the freedom to speak, to say whatever she wants. For Brad, words are a commodity, something to be bought, sold, exchanged. He is, after all, a professional writer. But this also leads him to see words as something that can be owned and used for whatever purpose their own might profit from. Lettice does not use words this way—she uses them to convey meaning, not to manipulate or create meaning as Brad uses them. Tellingly, on their first official date, he focuses on her mouth though she isn't speaking at the time, and having described her mouth over the course of an entire paragraph, "He looked at her and felt, suddenly, that he knew her." (*F* 62).

Their early relationship, like Maggie and Yasha's, is built in the space of intimacy created by her monologues,

when, late at night she would lie by his side in the dark...[and] offer him her life, all of it, all she knew of it, in a slow and humble way, in a ritual of love and redemption. It was as though she knew that the slightly overlong body which was Lettice Poindexter had no value beyond dreary animal warmth and nervous spasm unless it could be put in a perspective of the past events that had brought it here...and that Bradwell Tolliver, whose breath she could hear in the dark and

who would soon embrace that body, must, in the same moment be led to embrace and redeem all the past and in that process create the true, the real Lettice Poindexter. (*F* 63)

Brad's recognition that he cannot find the connection between his past and present selves is a direct echo of this truth so early known to Lettice Poindexter, whose letter later occasions his epiphany.

Lettice knows her true story and "speaks without shame of her life...[which enables her to] move around in her life as though it were a house she inhabited so familiarly she could find anything in the dark" (*F* 63) . This level of comfort is very enviable to Brad — he comments on it numerous times in reference to Lettice, Maggie and Leontine. Meanwhile, "He would lie by her side in the dark, hearing the story unwind, and feel cramped and bound in some dark mystery which was himself, like a box" (*F* 63).

Of all the characters who experience this awareness of inhabiting the self, only Brad experiences it in bounded space, which goes far in explaining his reticence about houses. For Yasha, as we saw earlier, the self is a deep watery darkness, as it is for Maggie—vast, limitless. For Lettice, as is revealed in a dream which she describes in her letter to Maggie but which is also very sharply remembered by Brad, "I was falling into dark, and the rope was rough on my neck, but it kept coming on, longer and longer and longer, as I fell. It seemed I fell forever, waiting for the jerk" (*F* 364). In retrospect, she sees the dream as prefiguring the reality of what her life would become when she was "goosed by God" and began her process toward true being.

The dream itself took place at a significant period in Lettice's own development. During Brad's absence, Lettice inhabits the space on MacDougal Street where she had first lain with him. She recognizes the significance of the space, and tells Brad, "that was the place where her past was re-enacted. The re-living happened only when she came there" (*F* 121).

Like Brad, she experiences memory spatially, but unlike him, she desires to enter the space of her memory and relive the emotions and intimacy that are captured there. She also experiences shame at facing certain truths about herself, like her infidelity with Echegary, but refuses to lie to Brad about it by not telling him. This is in direct contrast to his treatment of her. At several important moments of the text, she cries out in anguish, "But you didn't tell me—you never told me!" (118); "...you wouldn't tell me...you wouldn't even tell me" (269), knowing that telling is all that is needed for love and redemption. But she won't get that from Bradwell Tolliver, who is likely to respond "Hell, a man can't tell everything..." (119), likely to refuse to say what she needs to hear, or refuse to say anything at all. The scenes prior to his driving her to the train station, and even that scene itself, are filled with silences on his part. Right until the end, Lettice tries to redeem something of what they had, begging him to speak, to help her remember them as they really were.

Brad, however, will not realize until twenty years later what he was offered, or even that Lettice was a person, not a character or a symbol. In the end, "he began to realize for the first time in all the years, even in the years of the contact and the clutching, of the blending of hopes and mixing of breaths, Lettice Poindexter was real to him" (*F*

365). Thus it was her words, in the form of a letter, that reach out in love to offer him another chance at redemption.

In the long passages that describe his early life with Lettice, Brad is aware of the connection between being comfortable in the self and being able to tell a true story. He recognizes her telling as “a ritual of love and redemption,” and is awed by “her ability to speak without shame of her life, to move around in her life as though it were a house she inhabited so familiarly she could find anything in the dark. He would lie by her side in the dark, hearing the story unwind and feel cramped and bound in some dark mystery was himself, like a box” (63). He perceives the relationship between inner space and the circuit of discourse, but cannot participate.

He even denies that telling is unique and valuable, “Tell—the word tell,” he said, “Let us drop that word” (328) and substitutes words that lack the quality of utterance, like indicate and suggest. Brad prefers to indicate and suggest as opposed to tell, preferring the shadows to the real thing. To indicate or suggest is not at all the same as to tell, at least not in the context of *Flood*, where to tell it is to suffer it again, but only through the telling can one pass beyond mere silence into *le silence du bonheur*.

This is the state reached by Lettice very early, long before any of the other characters in the book. She reaches this state silently, inside the Fiddler house, but later shares it with Maggie: “There was no need now to tell him anything,” (*F* 177). Through love and the redemptive, intimate act of telling, she passes into the state described so often by Yasha as “beyondness” and “beautiffulness,” a space inside the self where there is no longer any need to tell or to not tell.

Her telling about her affair with Echegary in order to bring Maggie into an understanding of the connectedness of people and keep her from the lonely isolation to which the younger woman has consigned herself out of shame is understood by Maggie for what it is; a valuable lesson that will later enable Maggie to redeem herself, “She was trying to say to me , even if she had to suffer everything over again to say it, that you have to make your *you* our of all that sliding and brokenness of things. I suppose something of that come over to me then...” (F 273). Whether she understood it all then or not, Lettice’s telling enables Maggie’s redemption, just as her letter will later redeem Brad. In the end, Lettice Poindexter is as influential a structured absence as Thomas Sutpen or Sweet Home; she never appears in the narrative except in the memory of others.

There is an earlier point at which Brad seems about to enter the circuit of discourse that might free him. Frustrated with his ideas for the movie, Brad obtains the record of Cal Fiddler’s trial. Reading the transcripts, talking to the “supporting cast” (of course, he never talks to Maggie about it—what she could tell him would be too true, leaving no room for him to wiggle around in) and reflecting on his own memories, he literally re-collects all the pieces of the story that destroyed so many lives. Once he hears Frog-Eye’s retelling of the events , he finds that “suddenly he could remember all the events of that night which he never had before, over the years, been quite able to remember. He saw them all in his head” (317). One expects Yasha Jones to remember in pictures, but one could reasonably expect Brad, a writer, to remember in words. In fact, most of his memories of Lettice, his father and others from his past take the form of

dialogue. But this story can only be remembered by him in silence. In this silence, which takes place not in the Fiddler house, but in the swamp, where his own father went to cry face down in the mud, Brad recollects all the fragments he needs to piece together the telling from which “something could be redeemed. Everything could be redeemed” (302). But instead of carrying them back to the house and taking the next step in the circuit (telling the true story), he returns to the house only to fling his words at his sister in false accusation rather than sharing his new potential truth.

Reading the note Maggie has left him on the mantel, Brad “felt an elation seize him.He stood and marveled at the fact of his joy in her joy,” but this is quickly replaced by vindication that she is “human,” and like him, needed to escape the house. When she and Yasha enter the house, he feels a sudden, overwhelming “cry of yearning: he yearned for that joy in her joy” (*F* 324-326). He stands before them, characteristically motionless and emotionless, wishing he could feel something. More specifically, he realized that if he could express his yearning, “if he could utter it, that joy in her joy would come true.” Not only does the utterance not come,

the joy had not come. It would never come. He stood there...and knew that the lips were going to say something. He felt something piling up and throbbing inside his forehead, he felt a thickening in the chest, and he knew that the lips were going to say it. The lips were going to say whatever it was that was piling up inside his forehead and inside his chest. (*F* 327)

Instead, he accuses her of turning Yasha against him, knowing even as he blames her that the real reason Yasha rejected his treatment was that he [Brad] had been “crassly deafened by the clamor of mere factuality, [and could not] catch in darkness that delicate beat ofthe truth” (*F* 329). Again, Brad fails to speak truly, to utter what needs to be

said, and in that suppression of truth, disables himself from entering fellowship with Maggie, as he so often refused the communion of Lettice.

The letters from Lettice and Maggie that close the book as the waters close over and silence the town, confirm, as does Cal's final speech to Brad, that to arrive at the self, one must pass through the silence and into a "beyondness" that is the essential truth of the self and the self's journey. As Yasha advises Brad in one of their last conversations, "no matter what has happened to you, you have to come out on the other side of it and do a beautiful thing....[then] the time will come when there'll be no need to tell it and no need not to tell it. You'll be free then..." (287).

But that freedom only comes once one has entered and then *passed through* the silence, represented spatially in this text as the House of Forgiveness, a silent place of dark halls and closed doors, and "many mansions, some of which are lightless" (174).¹² Maggie and Lettice enter the Fiddler house as sanctuary, and in that space, are able to develop and grow and then move on, like a crab leaving its old shell for a new one. Brad enters the house reluctantly and flees as soon as possible, but somehow cannot get away from it: "he himself had never, in spite of all the years of flight, escaped from the house. He felt the weight of emptiness and darkness even now, above him and around him in the house" (325).

The house, his shell, is dead weight to him, a burden, and he doesn't even realize that it offers him anything more. When Blanding Cottshill asks him if he came back to Fiddlersburg to be "made whole. All of piece in yourself and with the world around you," he responds first flippantly, "Hell ...I came to make a movie," and on further inquiry into

why he came back not this time, but in 1940, he responds in outrage, "How the hell do I know ?" (293). In Gaston Bachelard's formulations of the ways in which a house can function phenomenologically, the house is a shell for Brad just as it is for Lettice and Maggie. He carries it but never really enters into it, and even seems to be trying to outrun it, unaware that it is part of him.

For some in the text, the house, like the self, is both "cell and world," (Bachelard 7) but for others it is only a cell. Cal's final epiphany and attempt to communicate its significance to Brad indicates that he has finally understood this dualism as a unity rather than a dichotomy. Brad alone fails to use the house as sanctuary, and when the house is destroyed, the reader wonders if he will remain a "dispersed being...cast into the world" (Bachelard 7), mistaking his own tears for the gleam of chrome on the highway in the distance. It seems that Brad has failed to redeem himself through the circuit of discourse. Cal's final speech to him reveals exactly the nature of Brad's failure to engage in this process:

let the silence flow over and the real you will ride on the that flood of silence like a chip on water...and then you shut your eyes and that thing that was unthinkable blazes up around you like a brush fire. It blazes up in the dark inside your head. You realize in that flash that there is no you except in relation to all that unthinkableness that the world is. And you yourself are....you know then that life is beautiful...But even if you yourself haven't had that beautifulness but you know it is there, and you are happy about the mere fact that it exists, then you have to find a way to say it....When you learn something like this, you have to say it. (345)

Brad never passes through the silence into the telling of the true story, and so remains trapped in his burdensome shell, unable to make manifest his true story but only to keep it hidden. Because his silence is not moving toward utterance, it "creates a void

that is vicious in that it deprives [him] of the possibility to attribute meaning to his being” (Grabher 353).

One wonders, with the house destroyed and the water rising, what chance Brad Tolliver has of "coming true," for it is only in their successful passage through the house that the characters of this novel can make themselves come true. For, as Bachelard observed, the house is the only "fragment of space...[in which] human beings can achieve silence" and in passing from the silence of the house to the world outside (be it the ruined garden in which Maggie tells most of her story to Yasha or an old folks home in Chicago from which Lettice writes her letter), both Maggie and Lettice manage to reach the beyondness and become the most fully realized selves in the book. They have outgrown the shell that the Fiddler house was for them and have moved on.

Alone on the hill with the water closing in, Brad is in some ways a helpless creature, waiting for the waters to overtake him as they overtake the town. If Fiddler crabs are best known for their ability to burrow so deeply in the sand that they can survive high tide, then Brad, not really a Fiddler though he long resided in the Fiddler shell, is left to face the rising water with no protection.

Leontine Purtle was supposed to be his shelter — her house and her body seemed appealing shells to take refuge in. He fancies her the Lady of Shallot, weaving a world, alone in a high tower, not risking participation or even direct viewing of the world, but seeing it all through a mirror and weaving her web/art/world out of the images there. On one level he sees himself as Lancelot in this allusion, and fantasizes about rescuing her from the rising waters and uncertain future of life outside Fiddlersburg. On a deeper

level, he wishes to *be* her, just as he wished to be Lettice — someone who could move around in the inner dark of the self, seeing it as a sanctuary instead of a box.

The same metaphors also come into play with Leontine Purtle, whom he equates with her house. When he first visits her at home, he “had that overmastering impulse. He had to see the inside of that house. He looked at Leontine and knew that he had to see the upstairs,” equating knowing Leontine with knowing the inside, specifically the upstairs, which in both psychoanalytic and phenomenological spatial analysis is equated to the privatized, intimate space of the higher self, of her home. He finds the interior “precisely as he predicted” (110) and wonders what it would be like to be inside the person of Leontine instead of just her house, speaking of her world as dominated by a darkness not frightening but soothing, like velvet, a space of letting go. His descriptions of what this space would be like resemble those of other characters, Yasha and Lettice in particular, since they concern what it is to enter the self and come true.

These passages are dominated by images of floating, flowing and falling, all equated for Brad with freedom, a condition to be desired, “to be in velvety darkness which is your light, to be free of something, to fall deeper into something” (111). Part of his horror at encountering her diaphragm is that he can't fall into her but is barricaded even in that velvety darkness. He thinks he will move in her the way she moves in the dark, the way Lettice moved in the dark, but this spell is broken by the diaphragm.

As with Lettice, Brad is fascinated by thoughts of Leontine navigating familiar territory in utter darkness, and envies her ability to move through inner spaces comfortably. He sees her as fully contained in her own world, as if her house, and

Fiddlersburg itself, were a womb in which she comfortably floats. The fact that her world is one of darkness makes it even more appealing and enviable than the world of Lettice Poindexter, who was Brad's first "Lady of Shallot." His recollections of Lettice prefigure his fascination with the silent, sequestered lady of Tennyson's poem. Though Brad tags Leontine Purtle as the Lady of Shallot, suggests his desire to play Lancelot to her, his own unwillingness to engage in the circuit of discourse prescribed by the text, his preference for shadows and mirrors and fancy footwork with the truth might make us wonder if the Lady of Shallot is his ideal of a woman or his ideal of self.

In either case, an analysis of the mythical lady's representation in Tennyson's poem relative to the themes being discussed is certainly in order. The Lady of Shallot lives in a silent tower on an "silent isle" where her voice is the only sound. She spends her time weaving a "magic web with colours gay," and prohibited by a curse she doesn't even know the nature of, she stays away from the windows and views the world through "a mirror clear / That hangs before her all the year/ [in which] shadows of the world appear" and she is content to remain in this containment, sustained by the occasional sound drifting upriver from Camelot. But when the lovers pass into her vision, she admits that she is "half-sick of shadows." Later, seeing and hearing Sir Lancelot (who is singing "Tirra lirra" by the river), she abandons the web and looks out the window, seeing the world directly for the first time. This leads to the total destruction of the web and the mirror, and then the death of the lady herself.

An interesting thing about the Lady of Shallot is that she doesn't go quietly. First she inscribes her name on the prow of the boat in which she'll drift to Camelot and

They heard her singing her last song/the Lady of Shallot/Heard a carol, mournful,
holy/ Chanted loudly, chanted lowly/ Till her blood was frozen slowly / And her
eyes were darkened wholly / Turn'd to tower'd Camelot. / For ere she reach'd
upon the tide / The first house by the waterside / Singing in her song she died.
(Tennyson 189)¹³

and floated silently into Camelot, where Lancelot muses about her lovely face.

So what is attractive about this poem to Brad Tolliver? It seems to voice both a fear and a desire — he fears that the curse of one who has lived so long with only shadows and mirrors, making up stories, is to be destroyed by a glimpse of the real and true, but he still on some level desires to sing his song, and envies those who dare to. What Brad most envies about the women in his life is their ability to move through their worlds and simultaneously, to name their worlds and their place in them, “they all seemed to move through the darkness of History with the expertness of the blind man in his own home” (64).

Brad’s last attempt to create a false story, with himself as rescuer of the pure and innocent damsel in distress, leaves him stranded on the hill, overseeing but not participating in the services that will mark Fiddlersburg’s last day. He might even be, like Roderick Usher, so inexorably tied to the house that its destruction will be his as well. But there is another way to read Brad’s fate. The clue is another structured absence, a slippery though noticeable silence — Brad’s own text, the “autobiographical treatment” rejected by Yasha as being “expert” but failing to capture the essence of Fiddlersburg. In fact, it is the second such text to disappear from the pages of *Flood*. The first is the novel Brad had almost completed based on the trial but which he shelved (with almost no objection) at Maggie’s request. She later tells him that she doesn’t mind anymore, that he

can resurrect that text for his screenplay, but he doesn't even answer. Brad, it seems, has lost the ability to tell a true story entirely. The text sinks entirely out of view, never to be mentioned again.

Like the actual rendering of the events of October 5, Brad's text becomes an absent presence, or a structured absence in Walsh's terms. Further:

Often, though certainly not always, either direct or tacit appeals to inexpressibility accompany the use of structured absences so that the art of leaving things out is subtly tied to an awareness of what cannot be said. (Walsh 112)

This is the case with Brad's narrative — which points to its own absence¹⁴, but also possibly to the impossibility of capturing Fiddlersburg in words. The fact that many things are said to “be” Fiddlersburg (the Fiddler house, Miss Pettifew's reclamation of the fetus in the jar, Izzie Goldfarb, the pen, the Confederate monument etc., are all referred to as metonymically Fiddlersburg) points to the many possibilities. Such an accumulation of possibilities is aimed at creating uncertainty — if it is all of these, how can it be any one of them?

Again, we return to the concept of the *impacted structured absence*; too many possibilities lead to conspicuous and utter uncertainty. We see this on a much grander scale in *Absalom, Absalom!* wherein the entire narrative is predicated on the uncertainty produced by numerous partial but possible sequences of events. It is also the case in *Beloved*, where no one can agree on exactly what she was but each person has an explanation. In each case,

the effect of all these “perhaps” clauses...is to suggest a number of possible explanations, each one put forward so tentatively that it cannot be wholly embraced, so that we are left wondering whether some or all, or perhaps none, of the conjectures might actually be true...so the reader is left with a sense of partial

or veiled revelation, a disclosure so tenuous that the true state of affairs, we half suspect, may well have completely escaped apprehension. (Walsh 121)

In the end, Fiddlersburg does escape apprehension — Yasha abandons the idea of the beautiful moving picture and Brad tears up the telegram from Mort Seebaum because he knows that his treatment, though “expert” and even, as it turns out, factually accurate, is not Fiddlersburg. He sees that Fiddlersburg is, in fact, an inexpressible *something*, and knows that to give it words would be to prevent its coming true for him. As he tears up the telegram, he trades in the lie of inauthentic saying for the truth of silence, the recognition that, at least in this instance, “Under all speech that is good for anything there lies a silence that is better. Silence is deep as Eternity; speech is shallow as Time” (Carlyle quoted in Walsh 6).

The absence of Brad’s text is significant, then, on two levels. First, its absence is glaring, calling attention to itself as a “...space hollowed out in the heart of the word” (Walsh 70). Second, it speaks to the inexpressibility of what it is that Brad was trying to capture—was it truth? Community? Love? Home? The feeling of Fiddlersburg, as Yasha referred to what he wanted from Brad’s treatment is ultimately not reducible to language. Ultimately, then, for Brad as for Warren, “... the “wholeness” of artistic vision paradoxically includes an awareness of its own incompleteness—that it is, like us, finite amid infinitude” (Walsh 25).

To conclude, the Fiddler house and its inhabitants enclose multiple forms of absence. Like so many of the old Southern houses under scrutiny in this study, the Fiddler house is a site of struggle and loss, taken from the Fiddlers by Lank Tolliver for sheer spite, later the site of Maggie's violation, Cal's betrayal, Lettice's miscarriage, and

Brad's failure as a man, an artist, husband and brother. We know that it is a "dark house," (referred to as such better than a dozen times in the text) but so is the House of Forgiveness. What Brad needs is to learn how to navigate this house in its native darkness, much like Leontine Purtle navigates hers, and to pass through it into the "beyondness". Brad is very conscious of the fact that others navigate their inner dark with greater expertise than he does, and often relates their ability to move around in themselves through spatial metaphor. But in the end he realizes that "there is no country but the heart" (*F* 368), and it is into this landscape that he must now move. Having at last recognized that the people he had for so long thought of as characters were all along real, he has taken perhaps a step toward entering into his own "mysterious inwardness," and in the silence there re-collecting those shadows of the unrecollected, those pieces of himself and the stories he has tried to un-tell, moving toward being: "Therefore, in his inwardness, he said: *I cannot find the connection between what I was and what I am. I have not found the human necessity.* He knew that that was what he must try to find" (*F* 367).

In the end, this movement toward solidarity saves him. For Brad as for his creator, "Both poetic and novelistic truths as trial assessments press against the membrane of truth, in anxious hope of some future mystic osmosis. That deep, enduring yearning, the hallmark of Warren's life work, comes from his vocation as a writer: to be both loner and lover at the same time" (Casper 15). Ultimately, Brad's recognition of the humanity of others and the shattering of the mirror as he turns from it toward the window have cast him out of the world of "pure art," in which words were his tools, into the

world from which, for Warren, art must come and in which words (and the silences that frame them) are a medium of truth.

Like the Lady of Shallot, of whom Tennyson wrote in his memoirs, "the new-born love for something, for someone in the wide world from which she has been so long secluded, takes her out of the region of shadows into that of realities" (Tennyson 86), Brad has finally turned to face the world, and to accept that he is a part of it. In accepting Lettice as a person rather than a character, he becomes able to accept that he is only Brad, not "Bradwell Tolliver," a character whose life and past he is constantly writing and revising.¹⁵

Sitting in the silence, gazing out over the water which was part of the waters that would soon cover Fiddlersburg, after the "goodbyes and the weeping," Brad knows that there are no words, that he will not sell the screenplay he wrote any more than he would resurrect the novel he began about the events of October 5, 1940. He knows that, "we all experience levels of awareness that can never be adequately housed in words" (Walsh 40). Rather than engage in another false story, Brad "submits to the possibility that "the secret and irrational life of men," all that remains mute or inexplicable, may constitute human truth and God's way of writing in crooked lines" (Casper 18).

In this text, "Being does not see itself. Perhaps it listens to itself" (Bachelard 215) and thus it becomes incumbent on those characters who seek redemption and true being, to tell their true story ; "every man yearns for his story" (63) and it is only by passing through silence like passing through a house and coming out the backdoor into a whole other landscape, that one comes, in the end, to stand in *le silence du bonheur* and "come

true.” In the end, for Warren as for Brad, “The writer’s art is, finally, the arrangement of silences” (Casper 46), or as Yasha Jones puts it, “...art is the right not-telling” (*F* 105).

Meet Me in the Green Glen (1975)

Like *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Flood*, *Meet Me in the Green Glen* is a text in which “the subjective voice of a woman character is present to such a degree that the traditional structure of masculine narrative can no longer hold” (Ferriss 5).¹⁶ The circuit of discourse here includes the possibility that for some, words utterly fail, and silence becomes a viable language, as we saw in *Absalom, Absalom!*. In that way, silence in terms of the structured absences is coupled with the possibility of a wholly paralinguistic sphere in which some experiences exist so completely beyond the ability to express them that the choice becomes silence or seeming madness. By following “the growth in Warren’s female persona from [Maggie Tolliver] to Cassie Spottwood, we may find...a different plot structure emerging in the narratives themselves...” (Ferriss 114). Doing so will involve a redefinition of terms like silence and madness, and even love and redemption.

This new vocabulary would then render differently our interpretation of the outcomes, for

Though Angelo is executed anyway and she is institutionalized, a moment of truth is shared at her outcry and his forgiving answer. They have acknowledged each other’s essential goodness. Their silence is no longer the sign of living death, but of life’s expansiveness, which renders all speech tentative, inarticulate. (Casper 19)

But what are the changes between the women of *Flood* and Cassie Spottwood? why is Cassie seen to be deranged by her experience and both Lettice and Maggie come through stronger, more whole? Perhaps it is because Maggie and Lettice had each other,

and later, the intimacy of community (Maggie and Yasha, Lettice and the people she served in her work as a missionary), whereas Cassie was always surrounded by people who objectified her (her mother, Sunder, Murray, Cy), and even her love for Angelo could not save her and stitch her back into the fabric of humanity, because Angelo was as objectified, isolated and silent as Cassie.

Perhaps Cassie's condition also had to do with her relationship to space, specifically an inability to dwell authentically in the self and in her space. Unlike Maggie, who took on the care of the Fiddler house (and with it, Mother Fiddler) as a kind of vocation, like Lettice and the Catholic charity, Cassie feels no real connection to her space. Certainly, she felt no compulsion to care for the house, and only nominally cared for Sunder, not out of love, but obligation and maybe even hate.

Most importantly, Cassie never went upstairs, never laid claim to the privatized, feminine space that the other women examined in this study retreat to because it shelters their language and their being. Even though the second story was hers, she never visited it, literally in terms of space or figuratively in terms of her story. Maggie and Lettice live in the second story in other senses. This indicates a comfort with feminine space, solidarity and silence, but also a comfort with their own stories.

On an narrative level, perhaps Cassie's lack of language has its origins in Warren's imaginative limits. Similar to Clytie's and Judith's in *Absalom, Absalom!* and Cassie is perhaps Warren's admission that the language of women is in many ways indecipherable in the masculine economy, heard as silence or mad ramblings that can only be translated by one who has come to an understanding of the paralinguistic sphere,

the elusive *something* which cannot be apprehended by words but exists in the space and language of the other.¹⁷

In *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, Warren brings his reader to contemplate "the mysterious otherness of the woman..." (GG 376), directing us to reevaluate the book in light of this eleventh hour revelation. Cy's "anguish is a moment of no little significance--for himself and because of its placement in the novel for the burden of Warren's theme" (Justus 299). Though Warren clearly directs the reader to recognize the centrality of the woman to this text, critics have, for the most part, failed to heed the author's directive.

In order to understand *Meet Me in the Green Glen* on its own terms, we should follow Warren's lead and see what is revealed when we begin to investigate the second story. It is important to consider what the woman, Cassie Killigrew Spottwood, thought and felt, in this text. First, because "the very existence of the novel is in so many ways predicated on a version of the female as other...", (Ferriss 141). Second, because the narrative is built around a series of "polarities, oppositions, paradoxes and inversion of roles," that takes as its foundation the alignment of woman and other, and the consequent relationship between the woman, her space and her language.

Through these injunctives in his criticism and fiction, Warren suggests a unique critical lens for reading his work. Although critics who write on *Meet Me in the Green Glen*¹⁸ may recognize that in it, "...Warren provides his most explicit statement about true being" (Guttenberg 154), none have tried to apply a lens that brings together all of Warren's apparent concerns in this work; namely, the relationship between true being and

love; the "concealed (or open) dialectical progression" and the metaphorical significance of the house and its constituent parts.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Sutpen's house is always Sutpen's. Even when he is away at the war, the women live in the house in a state of suspended animation, inhabiting only a few rooms, raising just enough food to eat and keeping his rooms clean and ready for his return. Wash Jones acts as caretaker in his absence, and the house is filled with Sutpen's male progeny and their sons during his absence and after his death, Henry finally returns to die in his father's house. But the house is never seen as being the property of the women who live there so much as the men who come and go from it.

Likewise, the house as owned masculine object filled with feminine space and language is at play in Warren's work. The Fiddler house remains the Fiddler house even after Lank Tolliver comes into possession of it, its identity linked to the man who was its progenitor rather than to the current owner. The house then passes to Brad, who returns with his wife and sister. Maggie's marriage to Cal Fiddler almost brings the house back to the Fiddler family, but Cal's murder of Tuttle as punishment for the latter's sexual indiscretion with Maggie (interestingly, this happens at the Fiddler house but not inside it, just as Maggie's relationship with Yasha will develop in the gardens and on the patio, but the couple then leaves the house to consummate their relationship, signifying perhaps that both perceive the house as belonging to the Fiddler's of which Maggie is one by marriage only, and thus not a space for their coupling) moves Cal off to the pen (the pen is the parallel of the Fiddler house, situated like it overlooking the town, also solitary, filled with silence and high lonesomeness, but ultimately also a space of redemption).

The house in *Flood* acts as sanctuary to some, but to Brad it is an inescapable part of himself, not a place to come to but something that is always with him, bearing down and overwhelming him. In the end, he is shot in its hallway, that most public of inside spaces. Likewise, in *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, the Spottwood house is metaphorically connected to the men. With the exception of Leroy Lancaster, each of the principal male characters are linked to the house as caretakers; Sunder, whose house it is and whose ownership is never questioned, even in his paralytic state; Murray, who assumes the active role of sustaining the property financially through the remainder of Sunder's life; Angelo, who both seeks refuge there and feverishly works to restore it, and Cy Grinder, its final caretaker who alone remains in its province after the valley has been flooded.

Unlike the women of either *Absalom, Absalom!* or *Flood*, Cassie does not lay claim to the upstairs but inhabits the downstairs rooms associated more with public than private functions and thus with the masculine more than with the feminine: the dining room that has become Sunder's sick room, the downstairs bedroom inhabited by Angelo and the kitchen. This inability to rise out of the masculine space may explain in part her inability to take up a voice. Trapped in the masculine space she cannot lay claim to, she is also trapped in a language not her own, a patriarchal language of division, of *lostness and too lateness* rather than the language of her heart through which she can articulate the hope for a *coming closeness*.

It is also important to recognize that the house is never Cassie's, but always Sunder's, and that he is the "symbolic heart" of the divisions in the text. His violent objectification of women sets in motion the spiral of many lives. First, he is the one

against whom Murray Guilfort defines himself as other. Sunder stands in direct opposition to Murray, who was "inside himself and could not get out. He had always been there inside himself and he had always been trying to get out. To be Sunder Spottwood galloping up the lane on a gray stallion..." (*GG* 366). His compulsion to quiet his hate and envy by referring to Sunder as his best friend, and his patronage during his friend's illness, assuming the role of caretaker for the man's house and wife, show his desire to cross the lines, to get outside, to be the One instead of the Other, to be Sunder instead of Murray.

Similarly, marriage to Sunder robs Cassie of any claim to subjectivity, any voice, leaving her "bottled-up", frozen, as emotionally paralyzed as he is physically. His relationship with Arlita leaves her in a stasis of rage that finds her in the Epilogue grimly waiting for their daughter, Charlene, to destroy herself. Sunder, in all ways, acts as a divisive force in the text, separating each character from the others and setting himself up over them. The Spottwood mansion continues to cast his shadow over the Valley long after the man himself has ceased to be anything more than an empty shell.

The house is irrevocably linked to the remaining Spottwood, whose very name means "to separate, to wrench apart, to sever"¹⁹ and "his body as dead weight seems to become the spirit of the house itself" (Snipes 144). When Murray first glimpses the house in Chapter 2, he immediately thinks of "young Sunder...and the fields were green, and fat cattle stood on the lawn and the sunshine...was over all. In that vision, the house glimmered white between the dark cedars" (30). The youth and vitality of Sunder are paralleled by the green fecundity of the grounds and the majesty of the house. Likewise,

Murray could as easily be describing the house as the man when he lists among his "private commitments, to stand and look at the hulk which could give no sign of the imprisoned, dwindling life..." (31) within. The "decaying Spottwood manse completes the symbolic pattern" (Guttenberg 4) of the novel in that it represents the faulty foundation of division that exploits the other, and stands as a monument to the patriarchal enterprise that also undergirds the binary system.

The Spottwood house was built by "old Sunderland who had grabbed the land, built the house, beat the niggers and gone to Congress, and whose flat, painted arrogance of eye refused, in this dimness, to acknowledge what, over the years, had happened in his house" (35); like Poe's House of Usher, Sutpen's Hundred in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and the Butler house in *Song of Solomon*, the Spottwood mansion is a metaphor of division, and it is no coincidence, in a novel which exhibits openly the author's need to question polarities, invert roles and invent paradoxes by way of pointing out the danger of divisive systems, that the mansion ends up under water, flooded by a medium that is essentially indivisible. The outside/inside line of the house is permeated and moreover rendered meaningless.

As a site of patriarchal strategies of division, its destruction by water once the woman is removed from the house functions to show the flaw inherent in a system based on such a worldview.²⁰ This system is "at its very inception an act of violence and presumption" (Chandler 251), and leads to building something which is "conceived and wrought in ambivalence, laid on a foundation of violence proportioned by guilt" (Chandler 258). Warren recognizes this, and calls the readers' attention to it repeatedly;

thematically, structurally and metaphorically. *Meet Me in the Green Glenn*, as Lucy Ferriss points out, "exposes the Self/Other dialectic as unreliable" (Ferriss 145). Keeping this in mind, and Warren's own directives, we cannot help but question the slippage between other seemingly stable binarisms in this text, primarily; subject/object, outside/inside, speaking/silent and public/private.

The novel begins in the Spottwood house, with Cassie looking out the window, up the road in "the mist and drizzle of rain...and sliding-down grayness" (3) and ends with Cy Grinder in his yard, stepping out of a shadow and into the "whole world, in its light" (376). Throughout the novel, the movement toward union of the self and world, an expanded version of the union of self and other (which is also an important theme of the book), has been paralleled by the slippage between outside and inside divisions. The subject/object opposition is closely related to the outside/inside division, and this is part of the reason for the predominance of spatial metaphor in a text whose author "sees that wisdom lies in recognizing and resolving the constant oppositions..." (Nakadate 7) created by these divisions.

As a metaphor for interiority, the house both reveals and in some ways determines the character of its inhabitants. Moreover, the archetypal form of the house in terms of phenomenological architecture is that of a "type of vessel, the function of which is to contain something and thereby split the world in two: to establish simultaneously an inside world which contains and an outside world which excludes" (Silverstein 83). This function of the house is very evident in *Meet Me in the Green Glen* where the house is

clearly the "surface that separates the region of the same from the region of the other" (Bachelard 222).

Angelo Passetto's entry into the house is his entry into the world of Cassie Spottwood, just as Brad's entry into Leontine Purtle's house is perceived by him to be an entry into her world in *Flood*. In both cases, the men are looking for a space in which to suspend themselves, to hide. Angelo seeks to enter an "illuminated darkness" in Brad's case, where he hopes to be able to float, to navigate himself with the kind of familiarity and comfort that he senses in Leontine, as once he sensed it in Lettice.

The house, then, in these two late novels of Warren's is analogous to the binary line itself in two ways. First, it is a point of suspension for the men in the texts. Sunder Spottwood hovers on the line between life and death in his coma. Angelo Passetto tries to hide from his past, embodied by the faceless "they" that he feels are pursuing him. He is also trying to mitigate between the person he was and the person he would like to be, gestating an identity like Thomas Sutpen dividing the world. In *Flood*, Brad Tolliver tries to *come true* and tell his true story instead of the false ones he hides behind for most of the text. He remains stuck in a groove of remembering and trying not to remember, like the needle on the record that repeats the fateful phrase, "the Continental," unable to tell the story and unable to live with it in the silence of his remembering. And the house is also the space that divides the world, its interior, the containing side, "a hollow, concave space" (Silverstein 87), a womb for the gestation of identity. Interestingly, Casper points out the "confusion of womb and world" (Casper 56) in the green glen of that novel, and like most critics, he seems troubled by this slippage. But to be troubled by

this display of the permeability of seemingly impermeable divisions is to miss the point of these late novels entirely.

Cassie early on exhibits an inability to enact strategies of division, beginning with her inability to define herself as either subject or object of her own gaze, " ...the staring was like a hidden animal creeping up that never took its eyes off her. Yet all the time "she knew it was her own, even when she felt that the staring was at her." Moments later, recognizing the source of this confusion, she wonders, "if there were people who always knew, right off, what was inside and what was outside their head" (*GG* 4). Critics interpret her inability to *sunder* the world as a deficiency on her part, and refer to her as being "so lost in the void that she cannot distinguish inside from outside" (*GG* 143). Her refusal to recognize this primary division is indicative not of her lostness, but of her potential wholeness. Yet, critics have not tried to see her as relative to Warren's philosophical concerns with the united self, or in relation to his other narrative personas.

Critical conversation that surrounds *All the King's Men* assumes the subjectivity of Jack Burden and discusses both Jack and Willie in terms of a movement away from fragmentation, away from the divided self that has its root in the primary divisions of Self/Other and outside/inside. Guttenberg notes that "the theme of dualism was not new to Warren," (143) and emphasizes that the tension between dualisms in *All the King's Men* is internal. One fragment of the self fights the others for primacy instead moving together toward true being.

For Jack, this tension is resolved when Willie and Adam are killed, and he simultaneously accepts his past, claims his father's house, marries Anne and thus comes

to Selfhood. His quest for unification, for true being beyond his previously divided self, is complete. But Cassie's lack of division is seen as just that, a lack, rather than a representation of true being. More importantly, many critics seem to follow the lead of the men in the text who objectify and silence her. Failing to recognize her subjectivity, they miss the fact that the narrative progression of the text is a description of her coming into being.

The realities of Cassie's world and time are represented in the text by the stories of the men in her life, who as characters are "peripheral, not only to the rhetorical strategy of the book, but...to its thematic construction" (Ferriss 132). Her silence and invisibility are framed on all sides by the subjective presence of men, all of whom objectify women throughout most of the text. Then Cassie begins to emerge from the ghostliness, to become more than a "whiteness swimming...in the shadow of the hall" (35), or "the face in the window." She is suddenly recognized by Angelo to be more than *the woman*, *cretina* or *la piccola*. She begins to materialize as a subjective presence. The first instance of this is when she begins to think about her relationship with Cy and the reader becomes aware, long before even he, that the woman is the thinking, feeling presence we should examine. Later, laying beside Angelo and staring out the window, she becomes aware of how it feels to be Cassie, not just a "space where something wasn't." Significantly, as these moments of realization begin to accumulate, she also begins to speak. Then, in Chapter Six, she becomes not "the woman" as she has been up to this point, but "the voice."

At the moment of this transition in naming, she comes to Angelo's room knowing his name and his story. Through her understanding of his isolation and violation, she begins to slide irrevocably over the line between Self/Other, offering him a more complete understanding of himself than even he can at first recognize. In this experience of voicing his story, she simultaneously transcends the boundaries of self and crosses the subject/object division as well.

Cassie moves into the position of subject by offering Angelo his freedom, telling him "I want you to feel free. To go out the door if you want" (*GG* 149). She is the subject of the first sentence, and he is the object. She offers him, through her love and transcendence of self, a way out of the binding isolation that living as a fragmented self in a fragmented world of neat but false divisions entails. He could go through the door; the outside/inside division would be meaningless if he could pass through its spatial representation so effortlessly. But ultimately, Angelo will be unable to translate her language of transcendence, unable to see what she is offering, and feel "cheated by his inability to touch and absorb the grace he senses in her" (*Casper* 50), precisely because he will not give up the divisions around which he structures his reality.

Angelo becomes real to Cassie when she can name him and enter into his story from her own experience; but Cassie, at the opening of the novel, was already living in a more fluid state than Angelo ever accomplishes. The house was, in a way, a womb for her, in which she floated — a semiotic, shadowy world of "no-Time," and quiet. Once Sunder was rendered helpless, Cassie was free from tyranny for the first time in her life (remember that she went straight from the tyranny of her mother to that of her husband,

was in fact traded between them), free to create a self beyond the object others had created of her, to define herself rather than be defined as the Other against someone else's One.

But, as we have seen elsewhere in Warren's work, in *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, the isolated self cannot come to true being, because it is the "death of the self is the beginning of selfhood," and this can only happen when Self and Other merge. Only through a "coming-closeness" among people is fulfillment of the self possible. Cassie realizes this instinctively, and is born into a new understanding of self and world through her merging with Angelo,

It is a different me, too....She thought of the air touching her face all over...how you were a shape where the air was not, but the air touched you all around and made the tingling that was your shape and made you know that you were alive and were you (GG 151-2).

She is no longer the absence against which others define themselves; she is the shape, the presence. She tries to share this experience and transcendent understanding with Angelo, telling him she just got born and observing that, simultaneous with her coming into being, the world has also been reborn, signifying her entrance into the "outside" world, while maintaining her interiority, her crucial understanding that "the world was all of one piece," and that she is finally a part of it.

But "emergence of the self [also] entails acknowledgement of the past," (Walker 209), something Cassie accomplishes when she takes Angelo to the room where Sunder lays. When he questions why she is letting him into the room now she replies, "So you'll know." He doesn't understand what the revelation of her past will accomplish and asks

"Know what?...she said, "Me" (*GG* 156). Much like Lettice Poindexter, Cassie realizes that in order to love, one must be known, and she makes this offering as Lettice did to Brad, (quote about giving herself slowly and knowing that she is only a body if she can't illustrate her story). Unlike Lettice and Maggie, however, Cassie's offering is visual rather than audile. Her language is that of silence

On the other hand, Angelo continues to hide from his past and from himself. This is clearly represented in the scene with the mirror in the upstairs room. At first he doesn't recognize himself, then gazes at himself with "bemused wondering," and as the "knowledge grew that this image was, really, himself," dawns, the candle suddenly flares and then goes out. He makes no effort to relight it, but instead focuses on the tiny light of his cigarette. In this light, he can see "the little area of the cheek and the left corner of the lips." But finally he flicks the cigarette out of his mouth, and "stood before the mirror, which he could not see now, and breathed, slowly and harshly, the dark air" (*GG* 108). This purposed progression toward darkness as he looks into the mirror reflects his desire not to see himself or the world around him.

So, instead of facing the past, seeing himself and accepting the love and merging he is offered, Angelo reacts to Cassie's emergence of self by enforcing a system of strict divisions, dividing day and night. He believes that "you could never carry what was real and belonged to the day over the secret line into the world that was a dream and belonged to the night" (171). When Cassie breaks her silence, she ceases to be an object. He is forced to recognize that she exists not only in the privatized, sexualized space of his imagination and bedroom. Alone, without him to define her, she still exists, inhabiting

the in-between space of the kitchen (a space at once public and private, an ambiguity highlighted by the activities that go on there in this text) and most often seen from him, during this period, through windows. The window both upholds and mocks the dialectical division of outside/inside, revealing the distinction to be meaningless and transient because permeable. He, who would uphold strictly such divisions, must confront continuously their falsity.

Likewise, the roles he assigns Cassie are all equally false--even as she begins to emerge as a subject, he continues to objectify her--as the scarlet woman of his fantasy, then as a vessel to be filled by his knowledge "he lived by the filling up of [her] ignorance" (177). Defined as an outsider, a traitor, Angelo recognizes on some level that he has been objectified, made to fulfill the position of Other. He turns to Cassie in an effort to find someone against whom he can define himself as the One. In the system of division that dominates his thinking, the One must dominate the Other and rob it of its subjective status by imposing a static definition in place of that identity, freezing and objectifying the Other, and thus "a free and autonomous being...nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other....to stabilize as object and doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego...which is essential and sovereign".²¹

Cassie, however, refuses to stay on her side of the line, to be categorized in any way. The beginning of the end of their relationship occurs when Angelo comes into the kitchen, itself an ambiguous space, and finds Cassie wearing the red dress and cradling

the newborn chicks. Angelo "stood there panting , not knowing what had happened to him" (183). The next day Angelo goes to the drugstore where he purchases for Cassie the perfume worn by the girl from Cleveland, a fantasy girl who left him for a man in a yellow Lincoln. "What happened" was that Angelo was forced to confront Cassie's multiplicity; he had all along avoided anything that would disrupt the fantasy that played out nightly in the kitchen, going so far as to avoid that room in the morning so as not to risk blurring his memory of what went on there at night. Similarly, he avoids seeing her in the morning, "for if he saw her there in that old dingy robe....something might happen, the bottom drop out of everything and he would feel himself shriveling away to nothing" (169). Wearing the red dress and cradling the chicks, Cassie collapses the classic Madonna/whore dichotomy and from that point on "nothing worked," and Angelo began pursuing Charlene in his quest for someone to play for him the role of other, of object, and thus save him from playing that role himself. He convinces himself that "nothing had ever happened," a sentiment echoed by all the other (conscious) men in the text, who consistently "push thoughts away," and "try to think of nothing."

Ultimately, Angelo can be seen to have reached some kind of understanding of love, as can Murray Guilfort, though only Leroy Lancaster and Cy Grinder come to it in time to save themselves. Angelo answering Cassie in the courtroom with an outcry of "Piccola mia" could be seen as his first crossing of a binarism. By taking his relationship with Cassie out of the private space of the house and into the public space of the courtroom, he joins her in breaching the public/private dichotomy. Ultimately, this act plays a part in his death; " he expressed love and received it in the courtroom, before the

eyes of his judges" (Snipes 143). This expression transgressed not only the public/private, but also the speaking/silence division in that silence and secrecy characterize the private sphere. As long as private matters were kept silent and invisible, the community had a place for Cassie and tolerated Angelo, but giving voice to the nature of their relationship was a serious transgression, for which Angelo paid with his life.

Leroy Lancaster, walking the streets of town unable to go home because he fears that his wife sees him as an "object of good works [who] would always be available for her charity," proceeds to resurrect, in defense of his subjectivity, a fantasy of her as a sexual object. He realizes that to erect this subject/object division, to divide Self from Other would be "to blaspheme against [his] own life" (278), is the first character to recognize that the loved other is essential to true being. And "slowly, he became aware that he wanted to go home" (278).

Murray Guilfort also returns home to recognize, though under somewhat grimmer circumstances than Leroy Lancaster, the love of the other, which he had denied, and so denied himself access to true being. In fact, he returns not to his own home, but to Bessie's. He contemplates her picture and the fact that she had existed. He realizes that "she had loved him." But then to spare himself the dawning realization that she had felt this, that she had felt at all and would therefore have to be afforded some status other than object, he tells himself "...her love was the mark of her inferiority, her failure." Finally he lets himself know the truth, "And of mine, he thought, even as he desperately tried to stop the thought: of mine" (369).

In his realization of the interdependence of Self and Other, of their essential indivisibility, he could accept, as Cy Grinder will, the anguish of knowing how he had failed. Instead he quickly resurrects his primary defense and establishes firmly the lines of division for the final time, desperately affirming both the binary system of divisions and the meaninglessness of love within a system that cannot allow for the merger of Self/Other, and so prohibits both true love and true being. He defines love as the inability to divide things "properly," the failure to sunder truth from lie, marking love as the territory of the foolish who call dreams truth: "to dream a fool dream like that fool Bessie Guilfort, to dream a fool lie like that fool Cassie Spottwood, to dream a lie and call it truth" (GG 369); *so that is love*, he wonders. Divided from Bessie and Cassie, he is aligned at last with Sunder Spottwood, the primary site of division in the text. His insistence on this final division causes him to sink, to go the way he imagines Sunder's house going, sinking and suffocating in darkness until "there would be nothing to remember" (GG 351). And nothing is what is left of Murray Guilfort, having never loved or left a mark.

So what of Cassie and Cy? One has become a figure of true being and the other is just awakening to the possibility through a sudden revelation. James Snead comments, relative to Faulkner, that the characters who escape self-division are those who already stand outside accepted systems of meaning. He points out that insanity provides characters like Quentin Compson and Darl Bundren with a way out (Snead 126). But I would suggest that insanity is another category and Warren establishes the polarity between sane and insane only to question and ultimately invert it.

Cy recognizes near the end, even as he still enacts divisive strategies similar to Angelo's, such as thinking at night of everything he will do the next day and believing that "if a man just keeps now in his head, there ain't nothing else," (GG 321), in all ways vigorously separating day from night, and more importantly, past from present, that Cassie "has a whole new... truth," (GG 305) He doesn't insist, as Murray does, on calling her truth a lie or forcing her to see the "real truth," as Murray does in his last visit. Cy's recognition of Cassie's truth as both new and whole indicates his approach to acceptance of true being.

In fact, Cy, like the women of Parkerton, seems to envy Cassie. A long passage in Chapter 12 names loneliness as the thing in the story that cannot be faced, but at the end, also admits an "unspecified guilt, and a need to atone for everything and to forget something" (GG 345). The loneliness of the story is first described relative to the people who lived it; but then the narrative voice seems to move into the story itself, appropriating Cassie's loneliness as if it were the collective experience of Parkerton:

...lonely to think of yourself paralyzed, trapped in yourself that way like you were your own coffin....lonely to think of that young fellow --the dago-- and that old woman lying up there together, at night, in that fallen-in house, and that paralyzed man in the next room....It was lonely to think of having something in you that made you try to get into the pen just when they were getting ready to strap the dago on the hot squat, and not getting in. It was lonely to lie beside that stone wall of the pen, in the brush, at night, and grab the stone till your hands bled, trying to get in, you loved somebody so much, if that was what you call loving." (GG 345)

The voice then abruptly extracts itself, and once again stands outside the narrative and the loneliness it seems to engender with a sort of glib disclaimer, almost as if Jack

Burden or Brad Tolliver had magically stepped in to narrate, "It was even lonelier for the dago, if you chose to regard it that way" (*GG* 345).

But loneliness is not the exclusive domain of those inside the story, and it again bleeds out to overwhelm those who try to stand outside, when "you wondered what that crazy Spottwood woman had got out of life that you never got, and the loneliness would suddenly overcome you like lostness and too-lateness, and a grief you had no name for." Even as the town, represented by the narrative voice in this passage, tries to separate those in the story from those outside it, viewing Sunder as already dead because of his paralysis, correcting itself when it refers to Angelo as a young fellow by then referring to him only as "the dago," and calling a crazy woman, Warren makes it clear that the loneliness cannot be denied by anyone, no matter their relation to the events in the Spottwood mansion. In fact, the cause of it cannot even be named, though it is revealed to Leroy, and to Cassie and finally to Cy Grinder through Cassie.

As Sunder and the house that represented him were sites of enforced division and domination of the other, Cassie becomes the site of unification; her truth is whole; her being is not separated into polarities and oppositions, but is a true being beyond division. Cy, like Murray, seems at first to assume Sunder's role. He is the one Cassie calls to take her to Fiddlersburg, and he assumes the role of active subject, carrying her in his car to the pen and then collecting her and bringing her to the restaurant where she remembers going with him when they were courting. She even imagines for a moment that he had never left her and says, "Maybe we live in Parkerton....maybe we're driving back from Nashville, been to see our boy in college over there.." but Cy cuts her off and "heaves up"

from the table so fast that his belt buckle catches the table. He hopes to escape a dawning realization, much like the one that will come to Murray Guilfort in the bedroom of his dead and unloved wife--that the world is all of one piece, and no one exists all alone in an isolated *now*, and this is why "he stood there trapped in that atrocity of anguish and could not breathe" (325). This episode lays the foundation for his later coming into being. It is first necessary for him to acknowledge and accept responsibility for the failures of his past, something neither Angelo nor Murray can do.

Cy is also the final caretaker of Sunder's house, a role passed on to him through Murray Guilfort, who gradually abdicates all responsibility for Cassie as well. Importantly, it is also Cy who presides over its destruction. With Sunder dead, the house flooded, and Murray finally "[sunk] into that truth that was himself, whatever his self was," (372), the sites of division in the text are all gone, because Cy accepts what Sunder, Angelo and Murray could not, the responsibility of love and the anguish of recognizing your own falsity, the blasphemy you have committed against your own life by refusing to recognize and merge with the other. He is tempted, both times the realization tries to take hold in his consciousness, to deny it, like when Cassie asks him why he walked away from her without even looking back and he replies, "How do I know? I just keep doing the things I do" (322). But finally, it is his love for his daughter, simple and whole, that breaks his pattern and enables him to make a true connection to another, which in turn enables him to come to true being.

Though Cy at first, like Murray, seems to assume Sunder's role; the acting subject carrying Cassie off to see Angelo and then the caretaker of Sunder's house in its final

days, it is important to note that he also presides over the destruction of the house, indeed, of the entire Spottwood valley and recognizes Cassie's truth as valid. And of course, Cy ultimately accepts what Sunder, Angelo and Murray could not — the responsibility of love and the anguish of recognizing your own falsity. The refusal to recognize and merge with the other is at the root of this falsity, this blasphemy.

He is tempted, when this realization dawns, to do as the other men in the text have done — to shut down, "...to think of nothing, nothing at all. But after a little, there in the inner darkness, was the face of the woman..." (GG 376). And Cy Grinder lets the face of his wife glow in his consciousness, where moments before he had held the glowing countenance of his young daughter in her room where moonlight seeped.

This is a direct contrast to Murray Guilfort, the news of whose death Cy had heard only hours before on the television. In *his* final moments, Murray sweeps the portrait of his wife off the mantel, shattering it in his rage and bitterness. Instead of being filled with love and the understanding of the interconnectedness of people, the love that holds them all suspended in this great and complicated web, Murray recognizes that he was loved but never knew love, and shudders at the "intolerableness of the never-having-known" (370). And instead of turning to look for love, we are told that "he hated them all" (370). In his last moments, he sunders the world, dividing it into self and other for the last time. His last thought is not even of Cassie, but of the red dress that symbolized for him her sexuality and her relationship with Angelo. Even as he lays dying, he objectifies the only person he ever claimed to love.

But Cy, standing barefoot in the new grass, looking at the house where his wife and daughter are sleeping, understands in a flash of insight and understanding, that the nightmare he has been having about his daughter, that "she would lie sleeping in a room where moonlight seeped, in a bed beside a stranger who...did not know or care who she was" (375), is the very life he has for so many years subjected his wife to. His love for his daughter opens him up and he is able to transcend self-division by entering into a true communion with the other.

Moreover, he comes to see the deep and indivisible connections in his world -- not just between Gladys and Agnes, but between Gladys and himself, a connection of which Agnes is a living sign. He wonders for the first time what she thinks and feels, "what she had ever thought, what she had ever felt" (376). "His wondering was mysterious to him..." and then finally he realizes that "never in all the years had he wondered that before" (376). This realization is the anguish that was "what he had to stand there and suffer" (376), and he does. He suffers the pain and neglect he has put her through; he suffers her loving and not having that love returned and he suffers his own "never-having-known," because he knows the time that has been lost to him. But unlike the other men in the text, Cy Grinder does come to know love through this sudden merger with the other and through this love comes to true being.

Finally, he steps from the shadows in which he has lived his whole life up to this point just as Cassie, through her love for Angelo, materialized from the ghostly shadows of Sunder's house, a house she had long inhabited only as a "floating whiteness." These two characters, so early wrenched apart and so strangely brought back together only to be

separated again, at last stand beyond darkness and division, under the moon and the sky,
"and the *whole* world in its light" (376).

CHAPTER THREE: TONI MORRISON
PORCH, THRESHOLD AND DOORS AT 124

*while knowing Speech can (be) at best, a shadow echoing
the silent light, bear witness
to the truth, it is not
(Auden, The Cave of Making)*

*"There are indeed things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves
manifest..." (Wittgenstein 135)*

*"Whether it be footprints in the snow or starlight, the pangs of love lost, or an
ingenious deferral to "something", the various vehicles for seeing what isn't there,
for sampling the infinitely shifting aftertastes of absence, press upon us from all
sides, so that we too easily forget how a large part of our consciousness is formed
in response to encountered absences and thwarted expectations." (Walsh 11)*

The inclusion of Toni Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved* in this study might seem an odd juxtaposition to the works of "the old masters," but I hope to provide ample evidence that Morrison's work falls well within the boundaries of the concerns raised in previous chapters. Certainly, I am not interested in examining this work as in any way derivative of the earlier works, though I do believe it engages them in a dialogue that is sometimes an answer, sometimes an argument and sometimes written in an entirely different language, that language often a dialect of the authentic saying of silence. Rigney observes:

In all of Morrison's fictions what is left unsaid is equally important as what is stated and specified, what is felt is as significant as what is experienced, what is dreamed is as valid as what transpires in the world of "fact." And none of these conditions of being is rendered as opposites; there are no polarities...Rather, experience for Morrison's characters is the acceptance of a continuum. (Rigney 143)

The experience of Morrison's characters also demands a recognition that these polarities — the system of binary oppositions — are upheld by the western cultural tradition at the expense of many who stand on the wrong side of the line. In Morrison as in the other authors under scrutiny in this work, this ideology is shown to be a design flaw at the foundation of American thought and culture.

Like the slave narratives it consciously resembles, *Beloved* contains a silence that masks profound historical omissions, "Morrison's narrative arises out of and is propelled by the need to elucidate a central traumatic event...*Beloved* moves gradually toward immediate contact with its initially veiled point of origin" (Novak 208).¹ As Morrison herself puts it, "...somebody forgot to tell somebody something....My job becomes how to rip off that veil" (Morrison qtd in Samuels and Weems 97). This use of the term veil is interesting, leading several critics to speculate on its linguistic and thematic implications:

Apocalypticism is a form of eschatology. The root meaning of *eschaton* is "furthestmost boundary" or "ultimate edge" in time or space. Apocalypses can be read "as investigations into the edge, the boundary, the interface between radically different realms. If the apocalypse is an unveiling...then clearly the veil is the *eschaton*, that which stands between the familiar and whatever lies beyond it (Robinson, xii-xiii)....The veil or *eschaton* in *Beloved* is forgetting." (Bowers 210)

But the veil is also that thin membrane between worlds, a function Morrison highlights in her description of Sethe's motivation for killing her daughter;

She just flew. Collected up every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there, where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe. (B 200)

The doors, thresholds, staircases and porch in the text function as spatial representations of the veil, boundaries between worlds, material representations of the binary line itself. As such, crossing the boundaries—passing from outside to inside, known to unknown, patriarchal landscape to feminine interior, spaces of speech into spaces of silence—demonstrates the transparency and ineffectiveness of such divisions; a permeable boundary is no boundary at all.

Moreover, "Morrison presents an apocalyptic demolition of the boundaries between the earthly and spiritual realms, an invasion of the world of the living by the world beyond the veil" (Bowers 211). Morrison herself takes the writer's job to be one of removing the veil, perhaps not tearing it off or destroying it, but certainly to sunder it, so that one can look through it as with a window rather than be confronted by a door. We should remember though that a door only seems impermeable; though it can be closed, it can also be opened. As Lawrence notes, "[i]n *Beloved*, Morrison suggests a way through the door of memory, even if that way entails a precarious balancing act between the danger of forgetting a past that should not be forgotten and of remembering a past that threatens to engulf the present" (Lawrence 244).

Whether we see Morrison as tearing down the veil like curtains in a window and exposing the view inside, or flinging open the door to expose its inhabitants to invasion from the outside, we certainly must take her word that she is attempting to show the experiences of characters previously hidden in the second story of the houses of

Southern literature. The female triad, and by extension the powerful community of women that comes together to overcome the past represent "an inquiry into the dangerous secrets of women's lives, their ways of knowing, and especially into their language and the wisdom and truth it expresses" (Rigney 140). These dangerous secrets are what lurk in the invisibility and silence of the second stories of the houses that dominate the landscape of male-authored southern fiction.

Both Faulkner and Warren allude to their existence, at times try to capture and translate the language, but ultimately stop the narrative eye from seeing what's upstairs. The second story is Morrison's territory; its language, her native tongue. Morrison's is "the language of black and feminine discourse -- semiotic, maternal, informed as much by silence as by dialogue, as much by absence as by present" (Rigney 138). So although 124 Bluestone houses the dangerous secrets of women's lives just as do the houses of Usher, Sutpen, Fiddler and Spottwood, it does not confine them to the narrative silence and invisibility of closed off upstairs rooms. Rather, women's language fills and even overflows the house, their voices and stories mingling, eventually indistinguishable from one another and uninterpretable to the male ears of Stamp Paid and Paul D.

Morrison's own narrative veils "remain implicit in the text which itself is a revision, an inversion, and, finally, a subversion of traditional value systems which privilege presence over absence, speech over silence" (Rigney 143). Said another way, "...in the listening silence [of the gloomy tarn that claimed the House of Usher, of the burned out ruins of Sutpen's Hundred, of the waters that covered Fiddlersburg and later the Spottwood Valley] Sethe spoke" (*B* 18). As Missy Kubitschek puts it, "[t]elling the

story of one's experience both relieves the teller and sustains the listener" (Kubitschek 175). More importantly, the telling in Morrison, as in Warren, enables the teller to pass through the circuit of discourse into deep silence, where one is neither compelled to tell nor compelled to hide the story. We see in all these works a desire to tell and thus be known; the relationship between telling one's story and coming into being is clear in Warren, and the need to tell and be free is clear in the characters of Rosa Coldfield and Quentin Compson in Faulkner's cosmos. Telling fulfills both of these functions in Morrison's texts. And, as in the texts examined previously, telling happens not just in words, but often more profoundly in the small spaces between words.

This chapter examines the ways in which *Beloved* addresses similar cultural issues using spatial metaphor in conjunction with linguistic strategies to incorporate significance beyond the denotation of words and to answer the question more directly than any of the others, in which freedom is a given for the central characters who nonetheless struggle to free themselves from isolation and the traumas of the past, "What kind of narrative can house unfree people?" (Bhabha 446).

"124 was spiteful....
124 was loud....
124 was quiet" (Morrison 3, 207, 293) .

So begins each section of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, with a number and personification of a house that figures as much as a character as any other in the text, and more than some. Likewise, the characters within the text recognize it "as a person rather than a structure. A person that wept, sighed, trembled and fell into fits" (*B* 29). In "Unspeakable Thoughts Unspoken," Morrison comments

Beginning *Beloved* with numerals rather than spelled out numbers, it was my intention to give the house an identity separate from the street or even the city; to name it the way Sweet Home was named, the way plantations were named, but not with nouns or "proper" names--with numbers instead because numbers have no adjectives, no posture of coziness or grandeur or the haughty yearning of arrivistes or estate builders...laying claim to instant history and legend. (31)

This, of course, immediately differentiates it from the other houses under discussion here, especially Sutpen's Hundred, which, written out as a word rather than numerals, as Michael Hogan observes, "reflects Sutpen's ersatz pedigree, his spurious claim to be part of the Southern gentry...124 signifies the uprooting of millions of black slaves while Sutpen's Hundred stands as one white man's furious, failed attempt to establish roots" (Hogan 171).

Even more ironic is that Sutpen has built his house on the labor of slaves, whom he has uprooted from Haiti and shipped to Mississippi to build his own home sweet home. Given that the houses of Usher, Spottwood and Fiddler were built during the same period and with the same motives, much the same could be implied about each of them and the

root causes of their inevitable destruction. In contrast to the other works in this study "where individual and cultural fragmentation are simply a given, the products of an unrecorded — and therefore presumably timeless— catastrophe, a catastrophe at the origin of time, at the origin of meaning, *Beloved* represents both the fragmentation *and* its causes" (Novak 215). Thus, the fate of both house and House are very different than in previous works.

Sethe and Denver, after the death of Baby Suggs and the departure of Howard and Buglar, "lead sterile, isolated lives, the ghost the only member of the family who seeks the intimacy of physical contact" (Lawrence 237). The sterility and isolation of 124 is similar to that of Sutpen's Hundred, in which physical contact is warranted only as an assault or at the very least, to prevent and prohibit intimacy, as when Clytie's hand on Rosa's arm prevents her from gaining the stairs.

Likewise, physical contact in the Fiddler house seems possible only as highly sexualized, such as that between Brad and Lettice, or violently confrontational, as with Brad and Lank in the library and later Calvin, Yasha and Brad in the hall. In either case, there is no real intimacy associated with the touch of another, and Maggie and Yasha must leave the house to consummate their intimacy. Importantly, the house is also sterile in the sense of barren--the only issue to be conceived in it, Lettice's "Pepito," is also lost in it when she miscarries in the upstairs room, a result of the events that transpire in the house on October 5.

The Spottwood mansion is similarly locked in a state of sterile paralysis. Cassie and Sunder have no children, and the house is isolated and falling to ruin by the time of

the textual present, Murray Guilfort its only visitor until the arrival of Angelo Passeto. Angelo's arrival, however, and consequent relationship with Cassie, is not viewed as a positive, and in fact ultimately condemns him in the eyes of the community, as if the space were meant to be experienced as sterile and static and were violated by the acts committed there rather than, as in 124, redeemed by them.

It is no coincidence, then, that all these houses fall to destructive forces, while 124 is rescued. In its space, silencing is replaced by the deep silence that follows true telling, sterility is replaced by tender intimacy between Sethe and Paul D, and the destruction of the younger generation that we saw in *Absalom, Absalom!* (or its complete inability to emerge at all, as we see in Poe and Warren's works) and isolation is broken by the return of the community to its province.

124, though as geographically and psychically isolated as the houses of Usher, Sutpen, Spottwood and the Fiddlers counters the divided, materialistic buildings of the old patriarchs with a dwelling that is characterized by tolerance and fellowship, whose occupants privilege community over self. This reflects Warren's concerns in both *Flood* and *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, as well as mirroring the narrative construction of the former and of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* in which many narrators are needed to piece together what is essentially a communal tale.

Beloved emerges through a sometimes torturous labyrinth of voices and memories, in large part because, as Novak observes, "[l]ike *Absalom*, *Beloved* is designed to produce or represent a series of marked absences — the absence of a narratable meaning, of a history that can be fully experienced or adequately known — around which

is then allowed to circulate a deep sense of loss" (Novak 200). In short, *Beloved*, reproduces in its narrative the fragmentation of self and community brought about by the circumstance of living in "all the sliding and brokenness of things" (*Flood* 273), a phrase that I think describes the conditions in which all the characters of the works studied here live.

Even the marks (as on Sethe's ma'am, Sethe's own chokecherry tree) and the names (the Pauls named sequentially with letters of the alphabet, Sixo who comes from a presumably analogous series) suggest the importance of membership, community, the inescapable oneness of self with other, individual the world of one's own community. Ultimately, *Beloved* too loses her individual identity, comes un-named and "has no identity other than that merged with the "Sixty Million and more" of the dedication, all those who suffered the outrage of enslavement" (Rigney 147).

One notices, though, that all of the sequences in *Beloved* are fragmented, with pieces are missing. The Pauls, for example, are lettered A, D and F. Paul F is sold, Paul A is cut to pieces and hung from a tree, but where are the others — B and C? Where are the others of Sixo's clan? We know that Seven-O escaped Sweet Home in the belly of the Thirty-Mile Woman, Patsy, but where are the other 5? Even the house number, 1, 2, __, 4 is a broken sequence, signaling that something is missing there. This text is constructed around numerous structured absences to which every level of the text points:

We can agree, I think, that invisible things are not necessarily "not-there"; that a void may be empty, but is not a vacuum. In addition, certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose, like neighborhoods that are defined by the population held away from them. (Morrison, *Unspeakable Things*, 11)

Morrison uses spatial metaphor and linguistic acrobatics to inscribe on her text the marks and markers of absence, loss and the utterly unspeakable. 124 is riddled with paradoxes which generate impacted structured absences as numerous and dense as those found in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Flood*. It is owned by white, dwelled in by black; a woman's space in a patriarchal terrain; "safe house and slaughterhouse. It is home to both priestess and pariah" (Hogan 168); it is a space of both freedom and enslavement, love that sustains and love that destroys, the importance of words and of wordlessness.²

"All of Morrison's works are about silence as well as language, whether that silence is metaphysical or physically enforced by circumstance....[and] like silence, absence is metaphysical in the text" (Rigney 142), which Morrison describes as containing "holes and spaces so that the reader can come into it" (Morrison 26). The text itself, by this definition, has multiple points of entry which the author herself speaks of spatially and linguistically in the same sentence.

At its heart, *Beloved* is an examination of the ideological structures that privilege divisive power hierarchies over communal sharing and intimacy. As Askeland argues, *Beloved* revise the models provided by masculine narrative "in a way that avoids reification of a patriarchal power structure" (Askeland 161). So, although *Beloved* speaks to many of the same issues that present themselves in the works of Southern male writers like Poe, Faulkner and Warren, using many of the same metaphors and techniques, it refuses to fall to the paradigms that destroy the houses in the other fictions studied here. In fact, Morrison's text demonstrates a reversal of the fate of the earlier houses, because it

is redeemed by those excluded from the symbolic order at work in the worlds (both textual and extra-textual) of Poe, Faulkner and Warren.

Though threatened by the same forces, the outcome is very different for 124 and its inhabitants; this is in part because they are the inverse of the characters who have power over the houses in the previous texts--they are black, female and more than that, symbolic of the maternal feminine, a force not encountered in the previous works where mothers disappear (Ellen Coldfield, Brad and Maggie Tolliver's unnamed mother), and childless women outnumber them (Judith, Clytie and Rosa; Lettice Poindexter who miscarries in the Fiddler house, Maggie Tolliver until she leaves the house, and the text for that matter; Cassie Spottwood and Sunder's first wife).

124, like the bodies of the women in the text, is not just a borderland, but also a battleground; its position in the text parallels that of the body of the mother, the safety of the interior world always in danger of being breached by attacks to the exterior. Women's domains were vulnerable because they were always conceived, designed and owned by males. It is easy to forget that 124 is not actually Sethe's house, but is rented to her by the Bodwins who bear an uncanny and downright spooky resemblance to the infamous Usher siblings. This awareness of the vulnerable state of women's worlds fits with Arthur C. Danto's reflections on the linguistic roots of the words we use to describe our dwellings. He observes that "domain" shares its root with a family of English terms that refer back to the Latin *domus* and so through these words "the house speaks to us precisely as the symbol of rulership, ownership, mastery and power..." This is, of course, the antithesis of the other meaning behind house, the Old English *hus*, which is "cognate with *huden*—to

hide, shelter, conceal, cover—which shows us the fragile, threatened, exposed side of our self-image as dwellers: beings the need protection, a place to crawl into...our walls announce our vulnerability" (Danto 9). I conclude, along with Lori Askeland, that in much of American literature, especially literature of the South

the house remains a sheltered "feminine" space, that is, a *hus*..., which by virtue of its enclosure in the "masculine" domain of materialism and commercialism, always remains in danger of being invaded and corrupted by it. (Askeland 160)

The vulnerability of the women in the house is evident in Faulkner and Warren as well as in Morrison, though not as clearly. It is well to remember, though, that the invasion of the house and the body of the woman inside it are what is at stake in *Absalom, Absalom!* and that it is the simultaneous invasion of house and woman's body in both *Flood* and *Meet Me in the Green Glen* that are the catalytic events around which both texts revolve.

This merger of spatial and body metaphors, then, is of no little significance to this study, especially as it is so definitely foregrounded in Morrison's text. Lawrence also perceives these concerns, and notes that "[i]n *Beloved*, the question of authority over one's own body is consistently related to that of authority over discourse; bodily and linguistic disempowerment frequently intersect" (Lawrence 233). One example of this is that Sethe's makes the ink that Schoolteacher will use to "dirty her."

The strongest example of this intersection is in Sethe's exchange of body for word in the barter with the headstone maker. In this exchange, bartering her sexual services for the single word on her daughter's headstone, "thus almost literally translating her body into the word" (Rigney 143), Sethe is both a text and a space, "her knees as open as the

grave" (*B* 6). The grave, like a threshold, like 124, is a space between; it is under the earth but marked above ground, visible and invisible, a presence that marks an absence.

Throughout *Beloved*, the body is figured as both text and interstitial space--it houses meaning, meaning is inscribed on it, but also through it, as with a vessel or a conduit. The vessel shape is of particular importance in spatial theory and phenomenological architecture. Among architectural manifestations of the vessel shape are the cradle, house, coffin and grave. These theories also note that the body as vessel is a universal human experience.³ I suggest along these lines that the female body, more particularly, the maternal body, because of its womb-function and because the breasts themselves become vessels of the maternal feminine and the life-nurturing role played by the mother, is even more directly related to the house, and that both the experience of the body as vessel and that of house as vessel is "primarily an experience of the feminine" (Silverstein 89).

The archetype of the house belongs to a family of forms the "primary symbolic equation of which is vessel = body = woman" (Silverstein 88). Erich Neuman writes extensively of the archetypes associated with the house, especially the vessel shape, which is the central motif in the symbolic constellation he calls "the Great Round" and also "the Great Mother."

Because the identity of the female personality with the encompassing body-vessel in which the child is sheltered belongs to the foundation of feminine existence, woman is not only the vessel that like every body contains something within itself, but for both herself and the male, is the *life-vessel-as-such* in which life forms and which bears all living things and discharges them out of itself and into the world. (Neuman 42)

This image of expulsion into the world calls to mind the scenes in *Beloved* of

Denver's birth, but also, perhaps even more strongly, the image of her on the porch of 124 "ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch" (B 299). In this scene, Denver is essentially reborn into a world of community and that birth is represented spatially as stepping off the edge of 124's porch, but also as related to language, as will be discussed later in this chapter. For now, suffice to note, that "...as social and cultural institutions, buildings are related to language because "both express the cognitive process of making distinctions, reflecting the tendency of the human mind to impose order on the world through schemata and naming" (Rapoport 284).

"Morrison fashions word and flesh as intimate allies in the project of constructing a domain in which body and spirit may thrive" (Lawrence 232), the word and the body working together to create a space in which to love. The relationship between space, speech and being, then, is a complex one, intensely interwoven to create a web of meaning wherein separating them into neat packages is impossible and ultimately severs meaning.

So, to be able to speak of this inexpressible compound of signifiers and their myriad possibilities, Morrison invokes the discourse of silence and absence. In addition to the structured absences in the text, Morrison must turn to another strategy for expressing the inexpressible, what Peter Walsh refers to in *The Dark Matter of Words* as "deferrals to absence". *Beloved's* deferrals to absence, the resonant *somethings* of the text, represent strategies for "incorporating vigorous shadows," to borrow Rodin's phrase, within the realm of words.

Something is a word always without specific meaning. It is an empty word that, while functioning as a semantic placeholder, can also function as something much

more — as a means of capturing *what we cannot say* and confining it within the inked scratches on a page. Even in context, *something* remains a nebulous quantity. Yet it is a word we cannot do without... (Walsh 28)

Beloved herself is this kind of *something*, a signifier. She is a figure that Walsh observes often in music and literature, not quite a character but "a gesture, a pointing toward that which is beyond the reach of words" (Walsh 67), or on the other side of words. As Paul D. notes, "She reminds me of something. Something, look like, I'm supposed to remember" (*B* 234), but of course, he can't remember, can't place her, and neither can anyone else in the community after she's gone, because there is nothing to remember. There's only the marker that marks the loss, the deep grief and hurt beyond the power of words to say.

How can one represent "loss"? It can't be done. All we can do is point to the place of it, the rememory, the mark, and remember in the language we had before we had the words, or at least when the words we had were ours:

Nan...used different words. Words Sethe understood then but could neither recall nor repeat now. She believed that must be why she remembered so little before Sweet Home....What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in. The same language her ma'am spoke and which would never come back. But the message — that was and had been there all along. (*B* 62)

In this way, silence is a respectful marker of the lost past, an authentic saying on behalf of a lost people, but not-lost people; "[t]he details of the original tribal life and language...are gone beyond recall, but they are not necessary to the continuity, to the memory of belong and having been loved" (Kubitschek 170). In the end, words are not needed, but community is.

The participation of the thirty women of the community in dispelling Beloved

"restores the primacy of African and African-American women's knowledge despite the obliterative overlay of European cognitive structures" (Kubitschek 166). Traditional western thought depends on the word and moreover assumes a correspondence between language and what it represents, a concept flatly stated in Genesis: "In the beginning was the word and the word was God." *Beloved* explicitly refutes this crucial European text. When the women holler, "They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound and they all knew what that sound sounded like." (*B* 259). "The word does not define. The word is neither alpha nor omega, only an imposition. Beyond the word lies...memory...which is always in flux" (Kubitschek 175).

The text, like "the unconscious, notorious for repetition without resolution, endlessly plays out derivatives of the repressed signifier...the nonsignifying word *thing* marks the gap left by the signifier repressed from conscious thought" (Wyatt 223). *Beloved* is *something* that marks not only the story of her own destruction, but that of the Sixty Million and all those who came after. Stamp Paid is the character who best expresses this. Though he cannot understand the world or the language of 124 , "...couldn't cipher but one word, he believed he knew who spoke them. The people of the broken necks, of fire-cooked blood and black girls who had lost their ribbons" (*B* 222).

The sounds around 124 are beyond the power of words to signify, for the characters or for the reader, and what can be heard in its yard is ultimately no different than the howling of Jim Bond, a sound that haunts the final pages of *Absalom, Absalom!*

and echoes beyond them: "...we find here a spirit that has lost its *being-there*, one that has so declined as to fall from being...and mingle with the rumors of being, in the form of meaningless noise, a confused hum that cannot be located" (Bachelard 217)

But why is it, though, that only women and not the entire black ex-slave community understand the *something* in the house; the men either flee from it or stand awash in its unintelligible roar. Bhabha suggests that the continual "forgetting" of domestic life in the definition of the private/public distinction introduces a negation at the very center of the society, .

In a feverish stillness, the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other... (Bhabha 445)

The ability to dwell in a world that is essentially a threshold between seeming distinctions is evident among the inhabitants of 124. They each recognize the house as existing between the worlds of the living and that of the dead, "suspended between the nastiness of life and the meanness of the dead" (*B* 4), between forgetting and remembering, between the past and the present, between words and the powerful *something* that exists beyond them. 124 is, "the unhomely, haunted site of the circulations of an event not as fact or fiction but as an "enunciation", a discourse of "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" --a phrase the circulates in the work and comes closest to defining its mode of utterance, the uncanny voice of memory" (Bhabha 450). This is not only the voice of memory, but of the maternal feminine.

"In all her novels, Morrison implies the primacy of the maternal and the semiotic

over the symbolic language of the father. Beyond the male "I" and the metaphysics of binary oppositions..." Likewise, they exist in feminine spaces, living in the houses of their mothers and grandmothers, "comfortable with female worlds and the matriarchal social structures these houses represent" (Rigney 139-140). Though threatened by the same forces, the outcome is very different for 124 and its inhabitants than for Houses/houses previously discussed. This is in part because they are the inverse of the characters who have power (even if not ownership) over the houses in the previous texts-- they are black, female and more than that, symbolic of the maternal feminine, a force not encountered in the previous works.

By including in her text voices that could only be housed in the "second stories" of male driven narratives, and thus not heard by the reader, Morrison's fictions transcend, and even undermine traditional philosophies by contradicting "the dualistic, objective posturing of western rationality" (Waugh 22), the privileging of patriarchal modes and meanings. It is in part this "project of incorporating into a text subjects previously excluded from language [that] causes a breakdown and restructuring of linguistic forms" (Wyatt 211).

Morrison introduces in this text three orders of experience traditionally absent from Western cultural narratives: motherhood as heroic adventure, the desires of the preverbal infant and the sufferings of the enslaved, including their experiences in slave ships. In other words, she introduces the contexts that are always absent but lurking in the corners (or at least under the eaves, on the back porches or under the windows) of the house of (Southern) fiction, the haunting, disruptive and often paralinguistic presence of

the excluded other.

The mother figure in *Beloved* is filled with paradoxical implications. She is herself the site of disruptive, divisive tendencies in western thought--once a sexualized object, she is now unsexed; the maternal feminine replaces the sexualized feminine. The horrific experience of having her breast milk stolen in a ritual of perverse sex and power collapses the boundary. In addition, it is Paul D.'s handling of Sethe's breasts by the stove that infuriates the baby ghost. The breast, functioning as a sex characteristic, confounds the division between woman-as-sexualized body and woman-as-maternal-body. Paul D.'s touch, "his body an arc of kindness, [as] he held her breasts in the palms of his hands" (*B* 21), enables her to remember the pain of the cruel crime against her, the stealing of her milk in the Sweet Home barn, and through this remembering, to begin forgetting.

This is, of course, the central paradox of the text, the primary threshold that must be crossed. As Warren did in *Flood*, Morrison here illustrates that it is necessary to pass through memory in order to come to a forgetfulness that is not a dis-membering of memory but only a quiet place beyond it, a place to "lay down sword and shield" and get about the business of building a future rather than "beating back the past." In the quiet moment by the stove,

[w]hat she knew was that the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in somebody else's hands....would there be a little space...just to stand there for a minute or two, relieved of the weight of her breasts, smelling the stolen milk again and the pleasure of baking bread....Maybe this one time stop dead in the middle of cooking a meal and feel the hurt her back ought to. Trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank? (*B* 22)

The sword of her anger and the shield of her memory; "the weight of the things

she remembered and those she did not" (B 120); the weight of these is the weight of her breasts, and all this weight is what she knows will sink her, just as she knows that Paul D. is the one who can help her bear up beneath it all. "Her story was bearable because it was his as well —to tell and refine and tell again — [even] the things neither had the word-shapes for..." (B 121). In the moment by the stove, she expresses a wish to be defined beyond just her maternal role, to "stop dead in the middle of cooking a meal."

But Beloved wants *all* of Sethe, a wish she voices numerous times in the novel. Sethe's motherlove, thick like the molasses that Beloved incarnate loves, is Beloved's only sustenance, and in this moment looms the threat that Sethe might try to define herself outside the limits of her role as mother. Panicked, the baby ghost begins to manifest her uncontrollable fear at this potential loss and is "rebuked" by Paul D., after which Sethe takes him upstairs to her bed, leaving Denver sitting on the porch, counting her losses in the face of this new one. But Sethe's attempts to define herself outside the perimeters of her maternity are short lived, ending with the breaking of her water when she sees Beloved sitting on the stump in the yard.

After this moment, Sethe's definition of self is limited to her role as mother. It is this limited and limiting definition of self as maternal body that forecloses her full participation in language, a symbolic system associated with the Father just as the semiotic, the paralinguistic, is maternal. "Sethe's problematic relation to language results from her position as body not only in the maternal order but also in a social order that systematically denied the subject position to those it defined as objects of exchange" (Wyatt 217). For this reason, it is not only Sethe whose relationships to words is

problematical. "As a unit, the community itself remains "ex-slave", unable to define itself outside the parameters of slavery" (Lawrence 236), and consequently unable to move into the symbolic system of language.

The ex-slaves of the community, including Paul D. all relate to words as "word-shapes," empty vessels that can be filled with meaning but essentially contain none. Worse, their meaning is always beyond the control of the black community. Words are merely objects that belong, like everything else, to the whites; "...definitions belonged to the definer — not the defined" (*B* 234). Because they are only owned objects, they are not necessarily attached to the meaning they are filled with, and a changing whim on the part of the definer could change everything.

Paul D. recognizes this, that he is a man only on Sweet Home and by the master's leave, and moreover, that "man" is only a word-shape, an object on loan to him. "Suppose Garner woke up one morning and changed his mind? Took the word away" (*B* 273). Like a clay pot whose usefulness resides only in its hollowness, or a house whose function it is to enclose a space in which dwellers may be protected and in which they have some power over a small interior world; "a word is only a "significant shape" that, like an "empty door frame" facilitates communication only because the freight we send through such an opening is not itself part of the frame" (Walsh 79).

Words, then, are markers, not makers, of meaning; they carry meaning only in so far as they are invested with meaning by some person or institution powerful enough to control the symbolic order. As a paralinguistic sphere, a halfway house between worlds, 124 is outside the place where the function of words can be easily defined or where

words can function *to* define. Understandably, then, there are many stories these characters just can't put into words:

Though Sethe struggles to find the words that will help her to make sense of her experience, she acknowledges...something that her response to the returning Beloved seeks to deny — that the killing of her baby in some way defies explanation. The motives for her actions, the event, its meaning, remain incommunicable....To the extent that she can explain her motives at all, she explains them entirely in terms of negation" "No. No. Nono. Nonono. (Novak 209)

Because the relationship to language is problematized in the world of the novel, and because the privileging of speech over silence is part of the same world view that is at the root of every conflict in this text, we might approach *Beloved* in a way that takes into account the *aesthetic of absence*. Our understanding of this text would be broadened by this approach, which implies "a full awareness of the enormous role played by language and conceptualization in our consciousness, [but] also mindful of paralinguistic spheres of experience — states of consciousness that are elusive and cannot be achieved, much less sustained, on the basis of conceptual thought alone" (Walsh 57). It isn't enough to look at what is said in a text where words have an amorphous and ambiguous relationship to reality; the not-said in fact gains ascendancy over the said.

In each of the texts under consideration, the central event is not actually rendered in linear narrative, but rather must be pieced together from the fragments of what is said, remembered and even what is not said. As with the events of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the events of October 5 and Cal's killing of Alfred O'Tuttle in *Flood* and both the murder of Sunder Spottwood and the execution of Angelo Passetto in *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, the actual killing of Sethe's child is never fully rendered in the text. Whenever Sethe's

story circles into close contact with the killing, "the narrative quietly sinks the event in a kind of interstitial space..." (Novak 210). Further, in the scene rendered by the narrative presence of the aftermath of Sethe's killing, she speaks not one word (*B* 182-88).

But Sethe's maternity is a complicating factor in terms of her relationship to language in another way. As Wyatt suggests, she may "hesitate to tell her story in part because the language available to her--a language structured by the logic of bipolar oppositions--cannot readily encompass the contradictions of motherhood under slavery" (Wyatt 227). We might remember here that the others mothers in the text are similarly silent: Ella's and Baby Suggs' memories of their children and the loss of them is never rendered in the women's voices, but by the narrative voice that seems to step in when words cease to say for the voices inside the text.

Mother-love also complicates her ability to interact with others. She is utterly unable to explain her actions or her motivations; "...she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get it right off – she could never explain" (*B* 200). This inability to explain is what cuts her off from first the community and then from Paul D. who finds her kind of love "too-thick." Like the community, Paul D "...wants to be able to draw a clear line between self and world, but Sethe's love of her children makes that difficult" (Askeland 170). As with Baby Suggs, Sethe's love is frightening.

Because they remain "ex-slaves" rather than free people, those of the community retain their views of what kind of love is possible. Ella, for example, loves not at all, and Paul D. advocates "loving small" as a way of staying sane in a world where you might be

"free" but still can't lay claim to yourself. Sethe and Baby, however, have claimed the right to self and the right to love that that implies. They had gotten to the "place where you could love anything you chose...[and] that was freedom" (*B* 171).

Sethe's reluctance, even inability, to place her experiences inside the hollow vessels of word-shapes leaves them anchored in the space where they first occurred:

Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone but the place — the picture of it — stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world....even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did or knew or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.
(*B* 44-5)

As Gaston Bachelard writes, "Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are" (Bachelard 9). Specific places, both outside and inside 124 become, accordingly, textual signifiers (Hogan 169). In addition to this harkening toward the rememory of Sweet Home, "...the plot reflects this spatialized time, as incidents from the past occupy various rooms in which they originally took place" (Wyatt 215), and in those spaces, action is repeated, things happen all over again, in an unending loop.

This looping is what keeps the present action from moving forward, as it seemed to be about to when Sethe, Denver and Paul D were walking home from the carnival about to enter the elusive "happily ever after" of stories. But "there are no gaps in Sethe's world, no absences to be filled with signifiers; everything is there, an oppressive plenitude" (Wyatt 216). When she looks around the house, it is filled with rememories (*B* 36). When Paul D speaks to her about staying on, he asks if "there was some space" for him. Because 124 is, literally, "[f]ull of baby's venom....there was no room for any

other thing or body until Paul D...broke up the place, making room,...then standing in the place he had made" (*B* 39).⁴ Not for long, of course.

Paul D.'s place is not secured until he relinquishes his need to play the man of the house. We notice in this scene the violence with which he "does battle" with the baby ghost, shouting at her to get out. Yet, Sethe and Denver have lived with the ghost for years, sacrificing even Howard and Buglar rather than move or dispel it. Paul D., having just arrived, steps into the role of master of the house, a role with dangerous implications in a text where even the kindest masters are seen to be a part of a dangerous pattern, implicated by the very nature of the patriarchal world view that places human beings in a binary relationship of master/slave.

The representation of 124 as feminine makes his take over of it seem especially violent, and the violence specifically directed at the maternal feminine, like the stealing of Sethe's milk. Paul D.'s intrusion into 124 is the first textual, though not chronological, instance of the "the world forcibly entering the house...in order to invade, alarm, divide, dispossess" (Bhabha 454), mirroring the intrusion of the slavecatchers and emphasizing the façade of ownership and safety that the inhabitants have allowed themselves to believe is real, a dangerous belief; "...by conceiving of a location as "ours" we cognitively create a domain, an area of power, while in the back of our minds we may have "housed" the knowledge of how arbitrary and fragile that power always is. For the...woman, this fragility was emphasized by the fact that she did not even own the walls she needed for shelter, let alone power" (Askeland 160).

Like Sutpen's Hundred, and to a lesser extent the Spottwood Mansion, "124 has

always been haunted by the ownership of white men--both by [their patriarchs'] literal ownership and the broader political ownership that allowed the men to invade her home in the name of the law" (Askeland 172). As was mentioned before, the house is still owned by the white landed gentry. In this case, the Bodwins, who are, like the Ushers, brother and sister, are the owners of an isolated, haunted house that "uses up women like Simon Legree uses up and throws away his slaves. "⁵

As Edward Bodwin rides toward 124 to collect Denver for her first day of work, he casually recalls "that women died there: his mother, grandmother, aunt and an older sister before he was born" (*B* 259). Morrison lets this thought stand for itself; it is neither repeated nor developed. Bodwin then concentrates on his lost possessions, childhood treasures he buried on the grounds, making the house, at least for him, a masculine domain, one he owns that also contains things he owns.

This view of the house is in keeping with that of Sutpen and the Spottwood men, men of Bodwin's own generation and class, and could be let to stand for a more general patriarchal view in which all things, including space and bodies, are objects to be owned by those with the power to obtain them; in a word, slavery. It is frightening, then, that Beloved herself comes to embody a similar set of views. "In her insistence on the absolute possession of her mother, Beloved resurrects the slavemaster's monopoly over both word and body..." (Lawrence 240), much like Sutpen asserts the power of the slaveholder not just over his slaves, but over his family and the space they inhabit.

Beloved "...embodies the pervasive, tyrannical memory of the "patriarchal institution" that continues to sap their ability to claim freedom. Because of this memory,

her "tyranny" has strong overtones of slavery's patriarchal force" (Askeland 173), and sets her in opposition to the matriarchal forces of love and community that eventually exorcise her. Her "violation" of Paul D. is that of a slaveowner "studding his boy," and importantly it takes place in the coldhouse, away from the feminine warmth of the kitchen. "In her quasi-patriarchal possession of the house, Beloved even convinces the fiercely independent Sethe that her womanly place, in fact, the only domain, is in the house" (Askeland 173): "Whatever is going on outside my door ain't for me. The world is in this room. This here's all there is and all there needs to be" (*B* 183). Beloved's hold over 124 and its inhabitants is a patriarchal force that seems to grow stronger and is eventually not destroyed, but only relocated.

Importantly, too, just as the community returns to lay claim, "we are reminded that these women are still the madwomen in Bodwin's attic as his presence returns to haunt 124 and the community with his power, and to haunt Sethe with the memory of schoolteacher's return 20 years earlier" (Askeland 172). Though he is well-intentioned and even kindly, Bodwin carries with him the ghosts of the patriarchal institution — the ghost of the "man without skin" in Beloved's vision...and those of the ghostly men who run the slave ships, pushing the dead overboard, into the sea" (*B* 215).

When Beloved sees [him] and Sethe running toward him, she disappears; the more permanent possessor/ghost has returned to his domain and her possession simply doesn't match up. She does not own the walls of 124. When Sethe directly attacks him — the real "ghost" of patriarchal ownership — the ghostly embodiment of her enslavement can disappear. (Askeland 174)

One might argue, in fact, that the entire novel is an attack on patriarchal ownership, and that the first attack on it in the text is Baby Suggs' remodeling of the white man's house.

Though not a scene that has received much critical attention, the remodeling of 124 from a perspective of feminist spatial analysis and in light of the analysis of the earlier works in this study is pivotal. It seems to me that the fact that patriarchal space here has been and continues to be remodeled, explains why 124 doesn't need to burn or be flooded. For Faulkner and Warren, the only terms in which they could express the need for the destruction of the ideologies that founded these houses were ultimately also patriarchal — terms of destruction to wipe out earlier construction. Within the metaphysics of the binary system, the alternatives are pretty cut and dried and monuments to patriarchal institutions and their destructive nature can only be destroyed in turn.

For Morrison, however, the options are more fluid and the house can be remodeled. In many ways, the House of Sethe is constructed on the site of the House of Sutpen, flooded with the silenced voices of the Spottwood Valley and finally with the deep silence, the *silence du bonheur* of the Fiddler house. As Maggie does with Yasha, Sethe will be able to lay her story next to Paul D.'s and construct a future out of the fragments of the past.

Some readers have claimed that Paul D. is emasculated at the end of the text, but this reading clearly ignores the possibilities for his definition outside the definitions available in a patriarchal ideology. His approach to the space of the house when he returns is markedly different than his approach in the beginning, when he was still an “ex-slave” and therefore still defined under the vocabulary of that most patriarchal of institutions. Like Sutpen, his initial instinct was not to replace the power hierarchy with a

more equitable alternative, but only to place himself at the head of it, “man of the house”. But in the end, he commits to inhabit it *with* Sethe and Denver, working with Denver to restore Sethe; not the head of the house, he is instead the heart. Recognizing "the power of the patriarchal culture ostensibly to offer the home as woman's *domus* and *hus* while remaining always threatening and able to invade that domain and shatter the security" (Askeland 175), is Morrison's alternative to the patriarchal concept of the family and house.

Askeland observes that Morrison's remodeling of the house constructs a "space where a warm, communal center could be made out of a working place in the home: a space where men and women can share themselves in the form of their stories."

(Askeland 175) If we can accomplish this claiming of self and space through love and community, through telling of our stories, then perhaps the "ghosts of the patriarchy may finally cease to have power over, if not to cease haunting, the houses of women's fiction" (Askeland 176). Integral to the creation of such a space, though, is the remodeling of the house by Baby Suggs, especially relative to that most domestic of spaces, the kitchen.

In her remodeling, her most significant actions are moving the kitchen inside and boarding up the back door, thus addressing the stratification of the white man's home on two levels—gender (the kitchen) and race (the back door) and restoring to the house its center--the communal, feminine, maternal space of the kitchen. In the model house of this region and period,

[t]he front rooms were reserved for family gatherings in keeping with the ideal of creating and protecting the unified family. Not surprisingly, however, these front rooms became excuses for lavish and prominent display of the (male) owner's wealth as the materialistic realm asserted its power over the feminine spiritual

domain....To protect this ideal/materialistic space, the kitchen had to be kept far to the back.. (Askeland 168).

Segregated from the public space of the other downstairs rooms, the kitchen is a space of work, creation, community, a woman's space. But more to the point, in Southern society , "The ideal became to separate the woman who worked from the True Woman who reigned on the pedestal of her front parlor, without a hair out of place" (Askeland 168). It is a space that male authors like Faulkner and Warren cannot even speak of, for the most part.

No one enters a kitchen in either *Absalom, Absalom!* or *Flood*, and the kitchen in *Meet Me in the Green Glen* functions as a perversion of feminine space--a sexualized space in which Angelo creates his fantasy girl out of Cassie and a space of confrontation between women (Cassie and Arlita) predicated on sexual jealousy, and finally as a birthplace for the baby chicks in the incubator. In short, this kitchen functions as a bedroom, confusing the public with the private, as was explored in the previous chapter. But the kitchen in 124 is the scene of much intimacy, acts of creation and nourishment, a true, warm center for the house. "Baby Suggs confronts the alignment of kitchen placement with servanthood and remodels her house to avoid it" (Askeland 168-169).

Denver's observation that "[Baby Suggs] built around [the backdoor] to make a storeroom, so if you want to get it 124 you have to come by her" (*B* 207) suggests that while "Baby Suggs had a clear understanding that her house could be invaded, she trusted in her strength as ruler over her domain, working "queen" of her kitchen." It is in this kitchen that Baby prepares the feast for her congregation; "She does not want to create a separate domain for community and spirituality; it is located in her kitchen....kitchen life

is holy" (Askeland 169).

This remodeled, lively house with a life-giving kitchen at its heart creates a communal space that unites both purposes of the house. It is both domain (a locus of feminine power to sustain and nourish life) and *hus*, a sanctuary and shelter for being. But this is, of course, the greatest danger of 124. It is a feminine space enclosed by a patriarchal domain, a "free" space within a country that recognizes the Fugitive Slave Act, thus negating the idea that it is free at all.

The boundaries of 124 are fragile, permeable--not walls, but windows. The gate cannot keep out the threat, the men just tie their horses to it and pass right through. The doors cannot be barricaded to prevent the invasion of the world into the home. The white men can lay their claim, not just to the body but to the self that body encloses and shelters at any time, or as Sethe puts it, "anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind."⁶ Not just to work, kill or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself no more. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up" (*B* 251). The body offers no sanctuary to the self in a world dominated by power ideologies and western traditions of division and the metaphysics of binary opposition, just as 124 offers none. As Paul D. observes, "That's what was lacking at 124: safety" (*B* 120).

While the women of 124 are laying claim to themselves by creating a place in which to love freely, the others in the book are trying to hold the lines of division in place. When the slavecatchers enter onto the property of 124, it becomes clear that the safety of 124 was an illusion, that they really weren't free and couldn't lay claim, and the

boundaries that the women of 124 tried to erase come back with stunning force. Sethe recognizes the schoolteacher's hat and his purpose; to stop him, she decides to put her children "on the other side," beyond the reach of white patriarchal power. Ultimately, the line of demarcation is the line between life and death. Consequently, 124, after the Misery, exists as a space between worlds. It literally becomes a threshold and as such, an investigation of the uses of thresholds in the text itself might lend to greater understanding of the functions of such spaces of "betweenness."

This discussion of the threshold will naturally encompass a discussion of doors and windows, and finally will turn to a close reading of the ending of *Beloved* and the function of the porch, another space that functions as an interstice, but also carries particular significance in the storytelling tradition and the oracular narrative tradition that is especially notable in the writing of black women authors like Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Cade Bambara and Gloria Naylor. This close reading of interstitial spaces and the final scenes of the text will enable me to speculate on the position of Morrison's work relative to not only the previously studied texts, but to contemporary writings as well, and explore briefly the possible meanings behind Morrison's use of space in this text and *Song of Solomon*, and from that generalize about some of her motives and overarching meanings in her body of work as it currently stands.

A fissure can be a window; absences can become thresholds, so the question is what we can see beyond the window frame and what such doorways open upon...And herein lies the special value of this story and many others like it: they may not be able to say much about what exactly lies beyond the threshold...but

they succeed admirably in bringing readers to a doorstep they may not have otherwise encountered. (Walsh 35, 46)

The present action of *Beloved* essentially begins when Paul D moves from his seat on the porch across the threshold and into the space of 124 proper. It ends with Sethe's crossing of that same boundary and the battle between the forces inside (Beloved) and those outside (the women of the community), which is literally staged on the porch of 124. Throughout the text, doors, windows and thresholds function as membranes between binarisms and even between worlds. To cross a threshold or even to peek through a window is no small matter in this text. Ultimately, the importance of porch is highlighted by the ending; not only its function as a space of storytelling and the oral tradition, as in works by Hurston, Naylor, and Randall Kenan, but also phenomenologically, in its architectural function, which is to provide shelter for the point of entry, and a kind of stage that foregrounds the house. Most importantly, though, I see the porch functioning as a kind of border, a space that is neither inside nor outside, a space that balances on the binary dividing line rather than settling on either side of it. Consequently, it is a space that serves diverse functions.

On the one hand, sitting on the porch enables a character to look out at the world with the security and identity of the house behind him or her. Characters in other African-American authored texts, such as Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, and Ernest Gaines' *A Gathering of Old Men* make use of the shelter and security of the porch to look out over scenes from which they want or need to distance themselves, and in some cases, just to

stare off down the road, watching out for what might be coming or trying to catch a glimpse of a shadow or footprint from the past.

But the porch is also looked on from the outside. In this way, it functions as a stage and as an interstitial space. For Denver, it is the intersection of home and world; by extension, it is the interstice between self and world. For Sethe, the porch is a space where the past and present meet, seeing Schoolteacher instead of Bodwin, clinging to Beloved instead of Denver.

Most important, though, is the function of the porch for Beloved. For her, it is a pocket of space between the womb of the house where she has grown like a grotesque fetus, a parasite that has drained its host, and the world that would dispel her, a world that has no "place for [her] to *be* in" (*B* 133). Standing on the porch, she sees Sethe's back turned toward her, a smooth blank surface with no point of entry, a closed door. This moment is akin to Thomas Sutpen's epiphany at Pettibone's door and subsequently the moment his own son, Charles Bon, stands before the blank surface of Sutpen's closed door. The body is again analogous to the house; the turned back and the closed door have unmistakably similar meanings, as we see, too, in Beloved's turning of her back as Paul D. takes leave of the house.

Paul D's crossing into and then out of the space of 124 highlights the functions of doors in the text, as does Stamp Paid's eloquent narration of the symbolism of doors in his life and the life of the free black community. Finally, Denver's passage into adulthood and community is represented by her passage through a series of doors. We remember similarly the importance of doors in young Thomas Sutpen's life and in the lives of his

sons. The formative moment for each of the young male Sutpens/Bons takes place on the threshold of a door closed against him.

For Paul D., the opening of the door and his subsequent crossing of its threshold is a moment of notable significance, and he is unable to make the crossing smoothly. His first step through the door freezes him in a pool of red light from which he instinctively retreats to the safety of the porch. Only his memories of Sethe's strength in their youth, the softness of her face and the trust he is able to extend to her enables him to walk through the door again, where he is engulfed by the thick sorrow that fills the house.

"Walking through it, a wave of grief soaked him so thoroughly he wanted to cry" (*B* 11). Paul D.'s experience of walking into 124 is the experience of rememory described later when Sethe warns Denver that the countryside is full of other people's rememories, just as the houses that dot its landscape are "packed to the rafters with some dead Negro's grief" (*B* 6). The text centers around this concept, that "Some things go. Pass on. Some things stay....[but] nothing ever dies," (*B* 44). Even those things that go, pass on, have only passed into another space, as Beloved passes from 124 to the river and then back to 124, and finally, back to the river.

Memory is housed not in time but in space. In fact, time is "hard to believe in," but "[p]laces, places are still there....the place...stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world" (*B* 46). 124 is a container of memories and rememories, grief and secrets, so its door performs a double function, keeping things in, but also protecting them from outsiders.

Paul D.'s entry through the door violates the space of the house. As much as he

and Sethe share, he is not an insider to the grief that 124 contains. There is every indication that part of Morrison's thesis in *Beloved* is that the kind of memories and grief contained in 124 is unique to the condition of the maternal feminine cast into the patriarchal violence of slavery, and for this reason, men routinely fail at 124:

"Halle...never arrives, Buglar and Howard abandon the house. Schoolteacher...leaves empty handed. And Stamp Paid fails for the sixth time to...merely knock at the front door..."(Hogan 179). Paul D. of course also fails there. Though he seems to have exorcised the ghost, she returns in an even more dangerous form to move him out of the house, violate and humiliate him. As long as 124 houses the rememory of motherhood enslaved, there is no room for men.

Paul D.'s systematic expulsion from the house is worth examining in this light. It begins with his being unable to sleep upstairs, a space already discussed in terms of its identification with the feminine. He begins sleeping in the public space of the living room, until one night he opens the door to Baby Suggs' room, the room nearest the entrance to the house. Briefly, it becomes his room, but his time in the house is nearing its close.

At first, he attributes his going to "house-fits," that most American of impulses to light out for the territory and flee what Huck Finn so eloquently refers to as the "sivilizin'" effect of domestic life. As Paul D. puts it, he "...believed he was having house-fits, the glassy anger men feel when a woman's house begins to bind them," but he knows that house-fits "are associated with the woman in it," and his compulsion is clearly not linked to Sethe, "who he loved a little more each day." He doesn't think that the anger

might be toward another of the women in the house; he decides that "in this house-fit there was no anger, no suffocation, no yearning to be elsewhere. He just could not, would not sleep upstairs..." (*B* 141-2) or anywhere else in the house.

He moves to the storeroom, adjacent to the house, and finally to the cold room, completely cut off from it. In that space, where her young life ebbed out against her mother's breast, a space she enters once with Denver and inexplicably disappears, Beloved traps him, separating him from Sethe by compelling him to join with her. In shame, Paul D. leaves 124 and Sethe. In his leaving, he "...looked up the white stairs. She was there all right," and has to hold back from rushing out the door.

Only when both Beloved and the ghost of slavery have both been expelled, one by the community of women and the other by the reenactment of that moment when slavery reared up in the supposedly free zone of 124 and brought motherlove to a killing place, this time with the violence directed at the victimizer rather than the victim, only then can Paul D. return. It was not for him, or for Stamp Paid, who also tried, to save the women or the house. His role is not that of savior, but of nurturer, and he returns to nurse Sethe, not to defend her. "His coming is the reverse of his going....he stands in the back, by the cold room....He walks to the front door and opens it....he climbs the luminous stairs" (*B* 331-2) that had once made him nauseous (*B* 152). He goes through the house opening doors until he finds what he came home for. The doors of 124 no longer shut him out as they once did.

Paul D.'s experience with the doors of 124 is in some ways less intense and profound, though, than the experience of Stamp Paid, a representative of the community,

and of the past. Like Sethe, he feels responsible for the state of 124, feels proprietary about it even, given his close friendship with Baby Suggs and his own role in the Misery. But like Paul D., the world of 124 is closed to him, a fact that amazes, outrages and castigates him.

Stamp Paid's understanding of the symbolic function of doors is more profound than any other character's in the literature examined here, more profound and succinctly stated perhaps than any other character in American literature. In his repeated attempts and failures at the threshold of the house, he illustrates Bachelard's argument about the centrality of doors to the metaphors of the house:

...a mere door can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect....a door awakens in us a two-way dream, that it is doubly symbolical. And then, onto what, toward what, do doors open?...The door is an entire cosmos... (Bachelard 222-24)

This is certainly true for Stamp who, on six separate occasions "raised his fist to knock on the door he had never knocked on (because it was always open to him) and could not do it. Dispensing with that formality was all the pay he expected from Negroes in his debt" (*B* 211). The significance of the door is not lost on any member of the slave or former slave community, just as it was not lost on the lower class Thomas Sutpen. An open door signifies respect and belonging; a closed door its opposite--exclusion, approbation, disdain, so

rather than forfeit the one privilege he claimed for himself, he lowered his hand and left the porch....Six times in as many days he abandoned his normal route and tried to knock on the door of 124. But the coldness of the gesture — its sign that he was indeed a stranger at the gate — overwhelmed him. (*B* 212)

Stamp Paid has spent a life ferrying people and messages, ignoring danger and

even ventures into the rush of sound that surrounds 124 like a veil, but he can't bring himself to acknowledge that he is an outsider at 124. He goes instead to Ella's house, where he found "a welcome door that he never had to knock on" (B 227). Just as it was for Thomas Sutpen, the encounter on the threshold with a door that refuses to open for him, stirs a deep sense of alienation and loss. Still, he understands something of not only the meaning of the door and acceptance into the interior of homes, but also of the language that circulates in the air around 124.

And as he comes to contemplate the closed door, each time he comes closer to awareness of its real meaning to a black man in post-slavery America, just as Thomas Sutpen comes to sudden, painful awareness of a similar door's meaning to a white trash Appalachian boy in antebellum tidewater Virginia. Stamp has long been witness to the cruelty of the white race towards the black, even carrying with him a peculiar talisman, a red ribbon found in the bottom of one of his boats, the woolly hair it tied still clinging to a bit of flesh. But he, like the community, had fooled himself into thinking that their insularity was a protection against further onslaughts, a delusion that Sethe's "rough response to the Fugitive Act" disproves. But what he hears in the yard and on the porch of 124 force him again into direct confrontation with the ugliness and violence of the past that he likes to think he has escaped and moreover, brought others out of.

What he heard, as he moved toward the porch, he didn't understand. Out on Bluestone Road he thought he heard a conflagration of hasty voices — loud, urgent, all speaking at once so he could not make out what they were talking about or to whom. The speech wasn't nonsensical, nor was it tongues. But something was wrong with the order of the worlds and he couldn't describe or cipher it to save his life. All he could make out was the word *mine*. The rest of it was beyond his mind's reach. Yet he went on through. When he got to the steps, the voices drained suddenly to less than a whisper....They had become an

occasional mutter — like the interior sounds a woman makes when she believes she is alone....Nothing fierce or startling. Just the eternal, private conversation that takes place between women and their tasks. (*B* 211)

He recognizes that the sounds are "women's sounds," associating them immediately with the interior voices of women. But, it isn't until his sixth trip, when he has given considerable thought to the issue of the closed door, his reluctance in front of it, his memory of passing through it with the body of Baby Suggs, his gathering memories of the violence and injustice he has witnessed and the subsequent understanding of why Baby Suggs retreated from the world and "her wish to consider what in this world was harmless," that Stamp Paid comes to the realization that "although he couldn't cipher but the one word, he believed he knew who spoke them. The people of the broken necks, of fire-cooked blood and black girls who had lost their ribbons" (*B* 232).

It is Stamp Paid then who recognizes clearly that the past that haunts 124 Bluestone is not the evil of what Sethe has done, but the evil that has been done to her, to them all, in fact, and he goes to Ella and the community with the intention of bridging the gap between 124 Bluestone and the rest of the black community of Cincinnati. Meanwhile, though, "[i]n the horrible inside-outside of unuttered words and unfulfilled intentions, within itself, being is slowly digesting its nothingness....In vain, the spirit gathers its remaining strength. It has become the backwash of expiring being" (Bachelard 217); it is clear to Stamp and later to the women who come into contact with Denver, that "trouble rode barebacked among them" (*B* 306), and lurked behind the closed door of 124.

An infant in a nineteen year old body, Beloved has not yet learned the codes that

give shape to and control desire... [she] recognizes no social bounds, showing a resistance to conventional form that is registered in the disturbing "cadence" (*B* 60) of her own words. While she craves adult language, particularly those stories that "construct out of the strings" of Denver and Sethe's experience "a net" to hold her (*B* 76), she is incapable of such constructions herself" (Lawrence 239). Denver on the other hand, values language and its power to build community.

Denver is, from the beginning, a product of female solidarity. Unlike the other women in her family who live primarily among men until arriving at 124, Denver knows herself to be primarily a member of the female community, observing that "the magic of her birth, its miracle in fact, testified to [the friendliness of grown-up women helping each other] as did her own name" (*B* 37).

In the story of Denver's birth we find the seeds for the book's ending and one of its ultimate themes; Amy Denver, acting a representative of the community of women who have little in common other than the condition of indenture in which they all, black or white, live, uses words, sound and touch to restore the body of the maternal feminine and to give life to a new generation of women who will perhaps be able to walk rather than run or crawl through the world.

Amy Denver not only brings Sethe's feet back to life, enabling her to complete her escape, she also transforms Sethe's body from "a graveyard for a six month's baby" to a sacred vessel that can carry and bring forth life and the sustenance to nurture that life. She changes Sethe from the fanged, cornered creature that crouched in the bushes to a speaking human being. When Amy speaks to her in the bushes, and Sethe realizes, "It

was no white-boy at all. Was a white girl," she opens her mouth to respond and is surprised to find that "instead of fangs and a split tongue, out shot the truth" (*B* 40).

Sethe's most recent interaction with people, Schoolteacher and his nephews, transformed her in her own mind, defined her as animal rather than human. Her interaction with Amy Denver redefines her again, as not only a human being but one with the power to create life and speak truth.

Not a mother herself, Amy nonetheless reconnects Sethe to the power of the maternal feminine, acting as a caretaker to heal Sethe's scarred back, and importantly, sharing her own mother's song as a prelude to assisting in the birth of Denver and Sethe's rebirth into the freedom that should be waiting on the other side of the river: "[o]n a riverbank in the cool of a summer evening two women struggled under a shower of silvery blue...there on a summer night surrounded by bluefern they did something together appropriately and well" (*B* 104).

The story of Amy Denver and Denver's birth introduces not only the theme of female community but the importance of words, sound and song. Amy's words encourage Sethe to make the painful journey to the lean-to, and the very sound of it penetrates Sethe's body to quiet Denver, "the sound of that voice... going on and on and on kept the little antelope quiet and grazing" (*B* 42). Later, Amy brings up the subject of parents, asking if Sethe knew her father. Neither woman has had any acquaintance with her father, and that settled, Amy soothes both women's loneliness and sense of disconnectedness by singing her own mother's song to Sethe.

The song, "Cometh Lady Button Eyes," a gentle, loving lullaby, is a harkening

back to the past life of Amy Denver's mother in Ireland before her sale into bondage disguised as a passage to freedom. It is all Amy has to remember her mother by.

Likewise, Beloved remembers her mother's song, and it is her humming of the song that forces Sethe to recognize Beloved once and for all as her lost daughter (*B* 216). Beloved remembers only fragments of Sethe; her smile, her earrings, her song, just as Sethe has only a memory of the mark under her mother's breast and the singing and dancing that were part of the lives of the slaves on the place where she was before Sweet Home. In each of these cases, though, it isn't the words that matter, "but the message – that was and had been there all along" (*B* 77), that they were their mothers' daughters, part of the community of women.

The images of Sethe's early life at the plantation with Nan and her Ma'am are images of women working together, caring for one another's children and the children responding to each woman of the community as her mother, or "ma'am." The narrative also stresses that this community has a special language that is more attached to meaning than the arbitrary words of the white community. When the words go from memory, so do the experiences and stories that were attached to them; "Sethe believed that must be why she remembered so little before Sweet Home except singing and dancing and how crowded it was. What Nan told her she had forgotten along with the language she told it in. The same language her Ma'am spoke and which would never come back" (*B* 77). But of course, it does come back. It comes back without words, but "the message...[is] there all along."

When Sethe is taken away after the killing of her child, she is denied the song that

would shield her because of her "outsiderness," what the community views as pride. If not for that, "the singing would have begun at once....Some cape of sound would have quickly been wrapped around her" (*B* 188). The community perceives Sethe as setting herself apart from them, and as such, deny her the shield and the bond of their words.

As has already been discussed, the white community has one language, the black community another. The language of the black community is complex; part of it comes from their long ago collective memory, represented in part by Sixo and his refusal to learn to read and write English, knowing that doing so would displace and then replace knowledge of his own language. Because of the connection between his language and his story, losing the language would be the same as losing himself. But part of the language comes from what Stamp Paid refers to as "the jungle whitefolks planted in them." This language creeps among them, "hidden, silent except once in a while when you could hear its mumbling in places like 124" (*B* 244).

As important as words are, it is the sound below the words that has the most impact; the humming of the women, the stories that women "sang sometimes, but ... never told a soul" (*B* 88), the veil of sound that is draped around 124, a mixture of voices and sound and mostly of "unspeakable thoughts unspoken" (*B* 245). While the men seem to speak freely, using their words to dispel ghosts, to form bonds, to cover lies and to relieve their own guilt, the women speak a language of sound, song and silence. Rigney observes that "[t]he central paradox [in *Beloved*] is that the silence of women echoes with reverberation, speaks louder than words" (Rigney 143), and that the songs of the women are their most authentic saying, beyond the silence to which they have been relegated in

public space and often even within the space of their own homes and stories.

As has been stated before, *Beloved* is a text focused on absence, on what is missing,

no compound of houses, no neighborhood...no time, especially no time because memory, especially pre-historic memory, has no time. There is just a little music, each other and the urgency of what is at stake. Which is all they had. For that work, the work of language is to get out of the way. (Morrison 33)

Women's songs, Morrison indicates in her texts and in interviews, are "just outside music"; often they are also codes, ways to break enforced silence. Songs in Morrison constitute a protest. Rigney notes that most often "...they represent subversion, and they speak the lost language of Africa, the language of Sethe's mother "which would never come back (*B* 62), and a heritage of freedom" (Rigney 139). Morrison herself wrote that "the sound of the novel...must be...a sound just beyond hearing, infusing the text with a musical emphasis that words can do sometimes even better than music can" (Morrison 32). This is true in not just *Beloved* of course. *Song of Solomon* is also a musical text, as is *Jazz* and to some extent *Sula*. Similarly, these texts focus on the relationships between women and between women and the world.

The image of women working together "appropriately and well" that is repeated twice in the section dealing with Denver's birth is one of a series of images of women working together. The memory of the story of her birth is in fact triggered in Denver when she sees her mother kneeling by Baby Suggs' bed, her waist encircled by the sleeve of a kneeling white dress and thinks, "[t]he dress and her mother together looked like two friendly grown-up women — one (the dress) helping out the other" (*B* 37). In the end, of course, it will be the community of women that come together to rescue Sethe and

Denver and restore the house and community.

But this image is first inverted, then perverted by the images of the women alone together. First in the scene at the Glen when Beloved goes from caressing to kissing to choking Sethe; later when they are skating and "no one saw them falling," joined together they don't so much hold each other up as pull each other down. The scenes of the three women alone in the house, after Paul D. has left and Stamp Paid has given up, are perversions of the ideal of feminine solidarity. Sethe and Beloved are joined in a ritual of love and guilt, unable to separate themselves — Beloved for fear that she will fly apart or explode, Sethe for fear of losing her daughter for a second time — they begin to slowly self-destruct. Beloved growing larger and larger like a succubus feeding on sugar and guilt and strong mother-love, Sethe shrinking and fading, and Denver, abandoned by both, left to save them all. Denver is the one who first unites "self and world" by joining what Wyatt refers to as "...a social order of language and exchange that both feeds her and teaches her to read" (Wyatt 222). She returns to the house of Lady Jones, a space in which she once experienced great joy in learning to read, expressed as delight in "the capital W, the little *i*, the beauty of the letters in her name..." (*B* 33).

Words are important to Denver, and ownership of them is essential to her sense of self early in the text. Like Beloved, she wants Sethe's words only when they feed her sense of identity, as in the telling of the story of her birth. Denver is not interested in any other story, and most often retreats to the silence of the "emerald closet" to tell herself stories in silence. She uses words to make herself, and in the absence of words that feed her, she is faced with words that destroy, that "shut her ears" and comes to prefer silence.

She is equally territorial about space, letting Paul D. and Sethe know that she considers his presence in the house an intrusion, just as the stories that he and Sethe tell each other edge out the stories she wants to hear. Like Clytie in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Denver perceives the house as a sanctuary, even a fortress, and regards any invasion *from without* as potentially destructive. Not knowing what triggered Sethe's actions 18 years earlier and "made it okay for her to kill her children" Denver cannot be certain that the event won't repeat itself. Given Sethe's warning that she could just be walking along one day and step into someone's terrible rememory, and the fact that a terrible rememory of her own happened on the grounds (significantly, not in the house or on its porch or even the adjoining buildings, but off in the shed, closer to the boarded up back door than the wide open front door), Denver's fear of the world outside 124 is legitimate, explaining why "she stood on the porch of 124 ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch" (B 207).

Her journey from 124 into town is fraught with tension and fear which dissipates with every friendly encounter and finally leads her to the door of her former teacher, Lady Jones. When Mrs. Jones answers the door and recognizes her, Denver cannot manage to speak or cross the threshold and has to be pulled in by her former teacher who in sympathy calls her baby, "She did not know it then, but it was the word "baby," said softly and with such kindness, that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman. The trail she followed to get to that sweet thorny place was made up of paper scraps containing the handwritten names of other" (B 305). Unlike her mother and the women of those earlier generations, Denver longs for the language of words, not silence. Denver in fact is fed on

words, just as Beloved feeds on sweets and her mother's love. Consequently, Denver equates silence with both solitude and starvation:

...anything is better than the original hunger — the time when, after a year of the wonderful little *i*, sentences rolling out like pie dough and the company of other children, there was no sound coming through. Anything is better than the silence when she answered to hands gesturing and was indifferent to the movement of lips (*B* 149).

Like her father, Halle, the only slave on Sweet Home that took up Garner's offer of education, Denver "does what is necessary" (*B* 305); she recognizes the importance of words. Denver knows the power of language to bind people to each other, does not want to live in the silence and the loneliness of the rememory that Sethe inhabits with Beloved. Denver ventures out to obtain food for her mother and sister, and at each house is herself nourished by the words that are given in return for her soft "thank you."

When she returns their plates and towels or stops by to thank them, the women of the community give her what she needs more than food; stories of the past, stories that weave her back into the fabric of the community. The women look at her and see that "everybody's child was in that face," (*B* 302), and their hearts let loose the long held grudge toward Sethe's silent pride and fierce claim. Interestingly, it is Ella, the other mother in the text, who "understands Sethe's rage...but not her reaction to it" (*B* 315), and explains that the turning away of the community had less to do with Sethe's actions than with her offense to them in living "as though she were alone" (*B* 315) when she got out of jail.

Denver, though solitary all her life, does not choose her mother's road. Her success in the community leads her finally to the door of the Bodwins. Before this first

encounter with white society, she meets Janey Wagon and realizes that "[n]obody was going to help her unless she told, told all of it" (B 311). She is also told that she should learn "which door to knock on." Having no memory of slavery, having no acquaintance with doors other than the "wide open front door" of 124, she is unaware that doors act not only as points of entry and transitional spaces, but as signifiers of the larger social order. Consequently, arriving at the Bodwin's, she proceeds to the front door, and even as she is chided for not coming to the back, does not recognize or internalize the sense of self-division that young Thomas Sutpen did in a very similar situation. Like Clytie, Denver does not recognize binary divisions and appropriates space according to her person-hood rather than her blackness or femaleness. This is in large part because of the unique world she has up to that point inhabited, a world with no back door, a world that is itself a threshold.

Hogan observes that "[t]he wonder — and the danger— of 124 is that it represents freedom. Sethe, arriving at the house after her escape from Sweet Home, experiences a rush of independence....Sethe's sense of self, like Sutpen's, is realized literally at the threshold of a house" (Hogan 173), but while "Sutpen's uprooting from his West Virginia cabin initiates his progressive alienation, the ex-slaves in *Beloved* respond to their deracination by establishing communal bonds" (Hogan 174). The expulsion of Sethe from the community, however, demonstrates the fragility of a world in which people may not any longer be owned, but also do not yet own themselves; "Freeing yourself was one thing: claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (B116).

What differentiates Sethe from the others is that from the moment she jumped

from the wagon in front of the house on Bluestone Road, she laid claim, not just to her self, but to love:

when I stretched out my arms, all my children could get in between. I was *that* wide. Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love them proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here...there wasn't nobody I couldn't love if I wanted to. (*B* 199)

Paul D. understands that "to get to a place where you could love anything you chose...now that was freedom" (*B* 199); he also understands that he isn't yet free. In fact, no one in the community is free until they take a stand against the past in the form of Beloved, and send the ghost of their own bondage and horror back to the blood-filled river she came from.

Sethe's moment of redemption comes, appropriately enough, at 124's threshold. With 124 as her stage and thirty neighborhood women as her chorus (functioning as a Greek chorus does, to elucidate, signify by repetition and represent the audience), she replays the moment 18 years earlier when, seeing Schoolteacher, she was driven to homicide. This time, however, the setting is radically changed, and moreover, so is the climactic action, dénouement and conclusion of the drama.

Janey takes the story from Denver to the women of the community, then "[i]t took them days to get the story properly blown up and themselves agitated and then to calm down and assess the situation" (*B* 315). But it is Ella who takes charge because "there was something very personal about her fury" and because she doesn't "like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present...she couldn't countenance the idea of sin moving on in the house, unleashed and sassy" (*B* 315). As long as the ghost has stayed on

its side of the veil, "showed out from its ghostly place," Ella and the community felt there was nothing unusual and certainly nothing unjust about its residency. "But if it took flesh and came in her world, well the shoe was on the other foot. [Ella] didn't mind a little communication between the two worlds, but this an invasion" (*B* 315).

The spatial references here are clear, and cast 124 as an interstitial space between the worlds of the past and present, and of the dead and the living. Ella didn't mind the ghost in the house, constrained as memories and ghosts are in this text by spatial boundaries. It is the idea that the ghost, a now-embodied past which encompasses the nameless and countless victims of slavery, including Ella's own forsaken child, the product of brutal abuse by the "lowest yet, can enter *her* world, that motivates Ella.

When the chorus of women asks her "Shall we pray," her reply aligns her with the many others in this and earlier texts who doubt the power of words; "Uh huh," she said. "First. Then we got to get down to business" (*B* 315). It won't be words that deliver Sethe from her torment, any more than the word "man," saved Paul D from being a slave, or any more than calling himself Stamp Paid freed Joshua, or for that matter, any more than calling themselves free made it so for any of the characters in the text.

At three in the afternoon, the thirty women who have armed themselves with conjure bags "stuffed in apron pockets, strung around their necks, lying in the space between their breasts...[and] Christian faith — as sword and shield. Most brought a little of both" (*B* 316), converge in Bluestone Road and walk smack into their own and each other's rememory, seeing themselves on the day of the long ago picnic, "young and happy, playing in Baby Suggs' yard, not feeling the envy that surfaced the next day" and

"[m]others, dead now, moved their shoulders to juice harps" (*B* 317).

Denver, sitting on the porch alone "heard mumbling," and stood to see them, "grouped murmuring and whispering" at the edge of the yard. She could not hear the prayer; only the monosyllabic refrain. Ella, trying to "see through the walls, behind the door," wonders if the ghost is whipping Sethe, and re-collects the horrors of her own life, and the child she sacrificed. And then "[t]hey stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (*B* 319). Approaching, Edward Bodwin "heard the singers before he saw them" (*B* 321), exchanging sight for sound as a signifier in this reenactment of Schoolteacher's arrival at 124 on a day when no cloak of sound shielded it, and it stood defenseless before him. On that day, the sight of his hat alerted Sethe, not the sound of the community; in fact that day, the silence around 124 was complete and obvious (*B* 182).

The "music entered the window," causing Sethe and Beloved to look through the window at the women in the road. "Sethe opened the door and reached for Beloved's hand. Together they stood in the doorway" (*B* 321), and from that frame in the threshold of 124, they are engulfed by "the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water...It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash" (*B* 321).

Unlike the sound that has previously surrounded 124, this sound rushes *toward* the porch rather than away from it. Caught on the threshold of a threshold, sound washes

Sethe clean of her sin. No matter what we take that sin to be: pride or murder, this is the first step toward freeing her from her rememory, the guilt of that sin made manifest, who still stands holding her hand on the porch which has become a stage. The women of the community look on, and again the connection to the Greek chorus and the staged drama is clear.

When Sethe leaves the stage, Beloved is "alone on the porch. Beloved is smiling. But now her hand is empty...she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding" (B 330), and disappears.

Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost, because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name?" All anyone can agree on is that "they saw something. (B 325)

Again in this text, absence gains centrality as Beloved reacts to the emptiness and as she had feared all along, is lost. Words have utterly failed; they erupt into pure sound that breaks the hold of the dead over the living and sends the past back to the still water, where "[b]y and by all trace is gone and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water, too" (B 336-37).

By refusing to name her, they refuse to claim her, in memory or rememory, either one. Once again in this text, as Walsh has observed relative to numerous works of literature

the act of naming falsifies as much as it clarifies and the only remedy is to initiate a contrary process of unnamings. By merit of its unrivaled transparency, "something" functions as a glass receptacle into which we pour what we cannot say in order to observe it without obstruction. (Walsh 167)

That she came and went; that she was *something* to all of them but not the same thing to

any; that her presence frightened them even before she brought herself back into being and descended from the air in and around 124 to inhabit the world with them, that's all anyone can say.

The unspoken, the *something* that she was, is that ghostly discourse that enters the world of 124 from the outside "in order to reveal the profound temporal liminality of the transitional world of the aftermath of slavery--its private and public faces, its historical past and its narrative present" (Bhabha 453). Unnamed, disremembered and unaccounted for, Beloved remains outside language and therefore outside narrative memory. Her story is "not a story to pass on" (B 274-5). Of course, this sentence is ambiguous: Beloved's story, too terrible to find resolution in the logic of narrative, cannot be passed on from teller to teller, but it also cannot "pass on," or die. As Wyatt notes, her story "continues to haunt the borders of the symbolic order that excludes it" (Wyatt 226), and not until *Song of Solomon* can be analyzed in light of its relation to the other texts under discussion here and the analytical lenses here established turned on the Butler house and its guardian, can we come to some peaceful conclusion.

Meanwhile, "124 [is] quiet" (B 293). Its *genius loci* has fled and in its place "is nothing. A bleak and minus nothing. More like absence." Paul D.'s experience of absence in the upstairs bedroom is even more pronounced; "It seems to him a place he is not," a place where he does not even exist, and although he can concentrate and picture himself there, he is, like the other men of Southern literature and Southern houses, excluded. Milkman Dead, like Quentin Compson, will gain entry not just to the upstairs rooms as Paul D. did from his first day at 124, but to its secrets and will hear them in their native

tongue. But Paul D. can only go back downstairs and contemplate the absence:

Something is missing from 124. Something larger than the people who lived there. Something more than Beloved or the red light. He can't put his finger on it, but it seems, for a moment, that just beyond his knowing is the glare of an outside thing that embraces while it accuses. (*B* 333)

124 is a closed door. When Paul D. looks at it, "it does not look back. Unloaded, it is just another house in need of repair" (*B* 324). No longer a space between worlds or a world in itself, the house is just a house like any other, and what is missing is not something to be missed:

[A] border-line surface between such an inside and an outside; this surface is painful on both sides....The center of being wavers and trembles. Intimate space loses its clarity, while exterior space loses its void...the raw material of possibility of being. (Bachelard 218)

Bachelard could have been describing exactly the condition of 124 in its role as a surface, a stage, a wall onto which shadow plays are cast. 124 is a border-line surface between worlds that cannot be reconciled except through bringing together the fragments of memory, washing them in the pure sound that lies beneath and came before the words and letting them dissolve in "sifting daylight." For Morrison, as for Warren and Faulkner, a story has to be told, even when it defies the tellers ability to pull it together into enough of a cohesive unit to pass on to another. It's the telling that is redemptive, not whether or not, in the telling, all the threads can be tied up neatly, knots unknotted and all the *somethings* tied down and named for the sake of convenience. As Denver recognizes when faced with Janey's question, only when all is told can the next step be taken.

A SPECIAL CASE OF SPACE: STEPS AND STAIRCASES IN
SONG OF SOLOMON

Staircases are a special instance of interstitial space, and occur in each of the texts under consideration here. In terms of spatial analysis, they connect realms in the already privatized space of the houses' interior, and lead, metaphorically as well as literally to the second story. Phenomenologically, climbing or descending the stairs is an encounter with the unknown, passing into an invisible space in which anything can be hidden. Staircases often appear to rise or descend into darkness, nothing, silence. Any glimpse of the staircase in Faulkner is likely to be that of the void at the end of the stairs. Even in *Beloved*, the reader sees the top of the stairs only once, when we look through Paul D.'s eyes and see Beloved standing at the top, her back turned.

They are not of great symbolic importance in either *Flood* or *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, but in both cases serve to separate the house into private and public spheres. The upstairs of the Fiddler house is a space in which women interact privately and silently, removed from the watchful gaze of the reader, as when Lettice ministers to Maggie after the events of October 5 and when Maggie performs the same function after Lettice's miscarriage. In both cases, Brad encounters a closed door and a feeling that he is an intruder. Otherwise, the space is sexualized by Brad, violated by the spying and near-murderous intentions of Frog-Eye and for the most part, silent. Leontine Purtle's upstairs

is envisioned by Brad as a kind of ethereal space of intimacy, and he equates it directly with Leontine herself.

The upstairs of *Meet Me in the Green Glen* is utterly abandoned by the narrative present, its bedrooms dusty, its mattresses burrowed into by animals, its halls silent and dark; the disposition of the upstairs, of course, is understandable both literally and figuratively in a house where intimacy has never resided. The Spottwood house is in no way associated with the feminine, except in that the first Mrs. Spottwood dies in the upstairs bedroom, nursed by Cassie. Murray Guilfort's voyeuristic fantasy about his hero Sunder bearing Cassie up the stairs to ravage her implies that the upstairs is also a sexualized space in this text, but not one of intimacy between men and women or between women, as we see in each of the other works. Only Angelo climbs the stairs in the narrative present of *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, in search of privacy, maybe. Or seeking some secret knowledge about the house and its mistress; he finds nothing but a dark room and a mirror. Unlike the Sutpen and Fiddler houses, the Spottwood house has no real "second story," in Jordan's terms. Cassie's silence inside the house is total, rendered as a kind of shocked speechlessness.

Unlike the women of the Sutpen and Fiddler houses, Cassie has no refuge within her house because she is utterly removed from contact with other women. She does not have anyone with whom to share her story or speak her language. Her conversations with Angelo are awkward and halting, each of them speaking into the *aft-silence* of each others' utterances, their words falling into a void between them. Her conversation with Arlita, in which the two could have shared their suffering, is a violent confrontation on

Arlita's part, a stunned bewilderment on Cassie's, as if she can't even grasp Arlita's language.

The stairs in *Beloved* are visible in the text, and often referenced. The upstairs eventually appears in the text as a space that excludes men. The "luminous stairs" definitely lead into the world of the feminine. Though Paul D. enters into the upstairs rooms, his discomfort, from the first time he lays beside Sethe, aware of the smallness of the bed, the closeness of the walls, is evident. His sojourn in that room is brief. From his first minutes in the house, Paul D.'s attention is held by the stairs. His observance of them sits somewhat awkwardly in the text amidst memories of Sweet Home and Sethe's small talk:

Out of the dimness of the room in which they sat, a white staircase climbed toward the blue-and-white wallpaper of the second floor. Paul D. could see just the beginning of the paper; discreet flocks of yellow sprinkled among a blizzard of snowdrops all backed up by blue. The luminous white of the railing and steps kept him glancing toward it. Every sense he had told him that the air above the stairwell was charmed and very thin. (*B* 13-14)

Unlike any other staircase in the texts under consideration in this study (or any I've encountered in other Southern literature), these steps are bright white, and though they lead into invisibility, it is not that of darkness but a kind of snow-blindness, a "blizzard of snowdrops." At their top is not the "dark, silent hall" of Sutpen's Hundred, or the echoing void of the Spottwood manse, but a space "where light came straight from the sky" (*B* 25). Rather than "haunted," these stairs are charmed.

Their most distinctive feature, though, is their luminous white color, a factor directly attributable to Beloved, who, as the crawling-already? baby had loved them so much that her grandmother painted them white. As Sethe tells her rememored daughter,

"...when I got here, you was crawling already. Trying to get up the stairs. Baby Suggs had them painted white so you could see your way to the top in the dark where lamplight didn't reach. Lord, you loved the stairsteps" (*B* 251). Loved them because they led up into an inviolate space, a woman's space, a space where no rememories lived or could overtake a family as Schoolteacher does in the yard? Probably not. Probably, she just loved to climb them. Even as a ghost, she is attracted to the stairs, and it is the sound of her crawling on them that restores Denver's hearing (*B* 127).

Whatever the cause of the baby's feelings for the stairs and where they lead, Paul D. senses that the second story is the "eyes and ears" of the house. He consistently senses that he is being watched from overhead. His departure is overseen by Beloved, though her back is turned to him at the top of the stairs, and at that point, as the women's world becomes more insular, they move from the visible space of the downstairs to the relatively invisible space of the upstairs. The second story of 124 Bluestone certainly exemplifies Jordan's use of the metaphor to speak of the upstairs of the house as analogous to the private lives, voices and stories of women.

It is important to note that only in Morrison can we see the top of the stairs. The staircase at 124 does not rise into darkness, but into light. Inversely, the staircase in another of Morrison's works, one perhaps more aligned with African-American literary traditions than with women's literary traditions, *Song of Solomon*, more closely resembles the staircase at Sutpen's Hundred than 124 Bluestone. The figure of Beloved standing straight and narrow, her back turned at the top of the stairs as Paul D. leaves through the

front door is grotesquely turned around, quite literally, in the figure of Circe in *Song of Solomon*.

This text, which in many ways invokes *and* revokes Faulkner's *Absalom*, *Absalom!* is most directly related to the short story "Evangeline," and in a sense, brings us back to consider these texts in a new light. Such a *re-vision* of Faulkner through Morrison will enable me to draw some conclusions about the direction of contemporary American literature and feminist critical interpretations of it:

Re-vision — the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction — is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves....We need to know the writing of the past and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (Rich 30)

It is not just *Beloved*'s story that is not to be passed on, but also the story of Thomas Sutpen, the Compsons, the Fiddlers, the Spottwoods, the Garners, the Bodwins, even all the way back to the pale and fading Ushers. In reality, it is the same story, told from different perspectives. Her novels create a "public space of trauma, providing a consensual reality and collective memory through which the fragments of personal memory can be assembled, reconstructed and displayed with the tacit assumption of validity. The construction of such a space is all the more urgent given what Grewal refers to as "the failure of the world to bear witness" (Grewal 14). Morrison does bear witness, writing outside literary convention. She maps this space, "through language, through a rendering of history, through a reinscription of identity and through the articulation of female desire" (Rigney 1), and in *Song of Solomon*, gives voice to a character who has

been shut in the silence of the second story more completely than any other, and ushers her readers into a space not yet encountered.

*Oh silence in the stairwell,
silence in the adjoining rooms,
silence up there on the ceiling. (B 230)*

Grewal suggests that "Morrison's approach to the past in *Song of Solomon* can be read as an attempt to revise contemporary fragmentation with a narrative of continuity" (Grewal 77). *Song of Solomon* is cyclical, developing meaning through the trope of a progressive return to the past. Though the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* and Warren's male protagonists also return over and over to the past, theirs is not a progressive return. No one in *Absalom, Absalom!* or *Meet Me in the Green Glen* is able to find redemption or salvation through a return to the past, as *Song of Solomon*'s central characters, Milkman Pilate, are able to do.

In *Flood* the only characters who are redeemed by the re-collecting of the fragments of the past and the re-membling of self that is entailed in their collecting and then stringing together the former fragments into a cohesive and shared narrative are the women, Maggie and Lettice. Both of these characters recognize the terrible power of the past, and the saving power of sharing memory as story. In this way, they resemble Sethe and Denver, saved by communal recollection and re-membling of the past and Pilate who truly knows and truly loves others, as both Maggie and Lettice come to do.

But *Song of Solomon* is also filled with characters who unable to experience a progressive return, though they live almost constantly in the past: Guitar, Ruth, Macon and even Hagar who perishes because her recent past with Milkman becomes the focal point of her life. In this text, we see that to carry the past is to carry the tools of one's own destruction. No one character exemplifies this like Circe, the former slave of the Butler house. Her resemblance to Faulkner's Clytemnestra Sutpen is striking, and through an examination of these character's similarities, and a discussion of Pilate relative to Circe, I hope to come to draw some conclusions about the direction of contemporary Southern literature.

According to Grewal, "[w]hat emerges in this novel reconstructing the historical consciousness is the stultifying reality of black women's truncated lives. Women's subjection, their lack of dominion over their own lives, is the subtext of *Song of Solomon*" (Grewal 73). Circe's domain is representative of this lack of subjectivity. Like Clytie, she presides only over ruin and destruction, displaying one of the many consequences of slavery. Though free under the law of man, she is not in any way free. She haunts the Butler house with as much anguish and anger as Beloved haunted 124 Bluestone and for much the same reason.

Approaching the house, Milkman reflects that neither his father nor Pilate had ever spoken of the palatial house

in any terms but how imprisoned they felt, how difficult it was to see the sky from their room, how repelled they were by the carpets, the draperies. Without knowing who killed their father, they instinctively hated the murderer's house. And it did look like a murderer's house. Dark, ruined, evil . (SS 240)

Like Paul D.'s entrance to 124 Bluestone, Milkman is unable to enter the house on his first try. As Paul D. was repelled by the pulsing red light and retreated to the porch, Milkman is overwhelmed by the smell of the dogs and goes out to vomit. But, like Paul D., he tries again and is successful at crossing the threshold. When his eyes adjust to the dim light, he peers down the hall and sees "at its farther end a wide staircase spiraling up into the dark" (SS 241). The scene of Paul D.'s leaving of 124 is called to mind, when he looks up the stairs to see Beloved standing with her back to him at the top. But what Milkman sees at the top of the stairs is a character from his own childhood nightmares,

the witch who chased him...into rooms from which he could not escape....So when he saw the woman at the top of the stairs there was no way to resist climbing up toward her outstretched hands, her fingers spread wide for him, her mouth gaping open for him, her eyes devouring him. (SS 241)

He doesn't at first recognize her as Circe, having been told that she was dead. In the course of their interview, he asks her if the reason she stays in the house is because the Butler's willed it to her, demonstrating the same lack of understanding and historical context as is demonstrated by the narrator of "Evangeline," who asks the same of Raby, and Shreve McCannon who asks similar question of Quentin. Instead of answering his question, Circe explains only why she is there alone, not why she stayed, assuming that Milkman will be able to figure that out:

The only reason I'm here alone is because she died. She killed herself. All the money was gone, so she killed herself. Stood right there on the landing where you were and threw herself off the banister. She didn't die right away, though; she lay in the bed a week or two and there was no body here but us (SS 245).

Circe, like Clytie, is left to oversee the passing of the house in both senses — the death of the last living member of the family that owned her and the house she kept for them.

But Milkman still misreads her motives. Like Quentin Compson and the narrator of "Evangeline," he has no context for understanding this aspect of African-American life. Faulkner tried to give voice to this story in "Evangeline," in which the story of the Sutpen family is passed to the narrator by the old ex-slave, Raby. His removal of voice from this character in *Absalom, Absalom!* testifies to his feeling that he cannot realistically render her story because it is not his story to tell, and moreover because he has no access to this second story.

Morrison, on the other hand, does let Circe speak. In this way, Circe can own her past and her experiences in a way completely impossible for similar characters in the texts of Faulkner and Warren. *Song of Solomon* is a text about ownership of memories, words and stories. In a 1986 interview, Morrison said, "I write for black women. Black women writers look at things in an unforgiving/loving way. They are writing to repossess, to re-name, re-own" (41). And yet, paradoxically at times, in this novel and its predecessors in this study, "ownership of things is juxtaposed against moral space. To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what...has meaning" (Grewal 61). Ultimately, space and language are as analogous in this text as in those previously discussed, and Circe's relationship to both sheds light on Clytie's untold story.

Unlike the texts of Faulkner and Warren, both of whom sensed the multiplicity of meanings implied by the mixed blood character, and perhaps in this way tried to represent the division and doubleness inherent in the African-American experiences, Morrison confronts the double-consciousness of her characters by forcing them to collect

the pieces of their communal and individual pasts, and to finally bring these pieces together in such a way as to overcome the fragmentation bequeathed them as the legacy of slavery. Grewal argues that the "two-ness of the Negro soul can be seen as a contest between memory and amnesia. American culture has traditionally demanded amnesia on the part of blacks concerning slavery" (Grewal 61). I would add that American culture has likewise demanded silence on the part of whites, especially white Southerners, about this same issue, creating a structured absence of tremendous proportions. Much of Southern literature is influenced by this absence, and Faulkner's texts especially demonstrate a need to frame the missing pieces of the Southern story.

Morrison, though, is able to go farther than Faulkner could and brings back the fragments of Southern (hi)story in the voices of her characters. In fact, "her novels mean to revise dominant historiography, reconsidering the scene of...violation from the *inside*, from subaltern perspectives hitherto ignored" (Grewal 8).

Circe's reasons for staying at the Butler house are chilling. Perhaps Faulkner could not even have imagined the rage and anguish of such a character, and for that reason assigned both Raby and Clytie a Sutpen heritage and thus an explanation for staying on after Emancipation. But Morrison does not shield her readers from Circe's hate. Milkman, like Faulkner, is unable to imagine her reasons for staying other than love and loyalty. Circe is appalled when Milkman asks her, "You loved those white folks that much?" and there, in the upstairs room, he hears her story. Like Quentin Compson, he had to physically go to the second story to collect it. But unlike Quentin, who was never *told* the story and who had to climb the stairs alone, Milkman enters into the second story

with its narrator. He does not have to speculate or pull together the fragments like

Quentin did. Circe tells him

She [Mrs. Butler] killed herself rather than do the work I'd been doing all my life!...Do you hear me? She saw the work I did all her days and *died*, you hear me, *died* rather than live like me. Now what do you suppose she thought I was! if the way I lived and the work I did was so hateful to her that she killed herself to keep from having to do it...(SS 249)

She goes on to say that all she wants now from her life is to outlast the house that was the Butler's reason for living, "[t]hey loved it. Stole for it, lied for it, killed for it. But I'm the one left. Me and the dogs. And I will never clean it again.... Everything in this world they lived for will crumble and rot" (SS 249). Is it possible that Raby and Clytie's destruction of the Sutpen house in their respective stories was motivated not by familial devotion but outright hatred for a house that imprisoned them all their lives?

The similarities between Raby/Clytie and Circe are certainly not coincidental. In "Evangeline," no reason is given for the destruction of the Sutpen house other than that it was facilitated by Raby. In fact, we never really know Clytie's reason for destroying the Sutpen house; we have only Quentin and Shreve imagining her state of mind and her motivations from their Harvard dorm. As I have stated before, what would they know of either?

The fact that Circe is raising the Weimeraners in the house is also interesting in light of a similar detail in "Evangeline." In Faulkner's story, the Sutpen house is guarded by a mysterious German shepherd, the last of which Raby had to procure, just as the Weimeraners guard the Butler house. But the Sutpen dog destroys itself when the last of the family is gone, leaping into the flames just before the house collapses, like a loyal dog

should. And like a loyal ex-slave should. Faulkner's stories both involve not just the destruction of the house by the woman left to take care of it, but both women intentionally destroy themselves along with the house.

Circe, on the other hand, has no intention of killing herself, and the line of dogs at the Butler house seem to be guaranteed a much longer tenure on the earth than the Butler's themselves, having multiplied so profusely. Circe is not one of the Butler's possessions but the final owner of those possessions, using one (the dogs) to destroy the other (house). Her agency is unquestionable, whereas even in their destruction of the house, Faulkner's characters were never granted agency or subjectivity. Their actions were reactions, and they, like the other possessions of Thomas Sutpen, perish in flames.

But this is not to say that Circe is in any way heroic. In fact, she is the counter to Pilate, the true hero of the text. Morrison's comparison of their ways of living and their deaths point to other important themes; "[t]he entire novel is about the interdependence of individuals and the insurance for mutual life: redemption cannot be individual" (Grewal 73). And of course in as much as language functions to unite a community, as we saw in *Beloved*, words are critically linked to this theme.

"Pilate is one of the very few women in American Literature capable of living the picaresque life which is given so easily to the male protagonists of our literary tradition," (Grewal 74), a tradition itself amended in this novel where the hero's journey is facilitated not by men, who pose the hindrance posed to other epic heroes by women, but by powerful and loving women. "In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison uses traditional forms so that she may show their incompleteness, their incompatibility with black life, particularly

the life of black women” (Rigney 56). Pilate is an outcast, cooking up liquor and keeping to herself; an unlikely hero at best.

It is her brother who seems a more likely candidate for the position. He is the son of a hero, surely. Macon Dead, Sr. resembles Thomas Sutpen, in that both men appeared from nowhere, claimed their land, and built their Houses, but the difference in their skin color allows for the murder of Dead by the wealthy Butler family, whereas Sutpen can only be alternately feared and despised by the same class in Jefferson. But "this novel...critiques the paradigm of male heroism" (Grewal 63), and it become obvious early in the text that Macon Dead is a coldhearted man, vindictive and petty; the qualities perhaps of an ancient hero, Achilles and Aeneas could easily be described in similar terms, but not a hero in Morrison's definition, surely.

Milkman's father is "devouring his own community for profit...he remembers the beauty of Lincoln's Heaven, he also practices the ethic of those men who destroyed it, and Milkman is the victim of this same contradiction" (Rigney 60), much like Henry and Charles Bon. Only his association with Pilate offers Milkman a chance at redemption. He comes to see the emptiness of his father's life and his cruelty toward Ruth. The fact that men often act in the text to hinder or harm one another demonstrates the true point of the novel; to constitute a "rebellion against the male dominated bourgeois social model" (Willis 41). The women in the text offer life; the men deal death. More importantly, women work together, constructing a social economy that stands against the values espoused by Macon Dead and for large parts of the text, his son.

"The post-Faulknerian American novel is of a genre that allows for the detailed exploration of interiority — a hallmark of Morrison's fiction, with its array of characters the reader comes to know with astonishing intimacy" (Grewal 10). She reconstructs social memory, anchoring the subjectivity of her individual characters in a collective history. It is through the "evocation of specific, historicized landscapes of loss and erosion that the reader is made to see in individual loss the limitations of the socius" (Grewal 13). Their relationship to others is a central difference between Circe and Pilate, as is their relationship to the past.

"The novel is buoyed by its mission of retrieving the knowledge of the past" (Grewal 70), not just presiding over its demise, envisioning it as having belonged to only one race. "Pilate's death underscores the necessity of the recuperation of the dying heritage." What we are left with after Pilate's death is not a sack of bones or the ruins of an old mansion, but the living word. Her legacy is a song, the words carefully recollected by Milkman and carefully enunciated at the novel's end. Far from a dislocated howl among the ashes, the sound echoing from this text is a song that ties together the past and the present. In singing a new hero into an old song, Milkman demonstrates one way in which the past can be redeemed and in its recollection and redemption, offer hope to a community long silenced by the violence and indignities of the past.

In *Song of Solomon*, "the failure to seize the word and make it one's own results in enslavement to someone else's language" (Rigney 64). The song that Milkman sings at the end of the text connects him to the past and lays claim to language, like the naming of Not Doctor street is the community's claim to both the past and a language of its own.

Milkman sings Pilate into the song, placing her in the position of the hero, celebrated for uniqueness, "Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly." Her last words are an effort at connection, asking Milkman to watch over her daughter, Reba. This inverts the original heroic paradigm in the song; Solomon flew off and left his offspring. Not only the song, but the novel itself "takes the place of Pilate's absence, commemorating in print what she embodied" (Grewal 63). Again, it is through ownership of language and the naming of the individual spirit that salvation is proffered. In her Nobel Lecture, Morrison underscores the centrality of language saying, "unreceptive to interrogation, it [unyielding language] cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, or fill baffling silences" (14).

Pilate's last wish is a wish for community; "I wish I'd a knowed more people. I would have loved them all" (SS 336), and highlights the difference between her character and that of Circe, whose final wish is to see the Butler house crumble to ruin, and to be found in death before the dogs have eaten her corpse. The two women signify two different ways of re-membering the past, and a shift in the concerns of African-American and Southern literature away from "the persistent call to oblivion made by mainstream society" (Jones 131). In a character like Circe we see the old view of the Southern past, a heritage of victimization and one-sided stories. In Pilate and Milkman, we see characters who lay claim to a usable past by naming it in living language and singing themselves into its songs.

"We cannot really claim ourselves morally or politically until we have reconstructed our collective identity, reexamined our dead and our disremembered" (Grewal 8). As Morrison puts it:

We abandoned the past and a lot of the truth and sustenance that went with it. In trying to cure the cancer of slavery and its consequences, some healthy as well as malignant cells were destroyed...the point is to recognize and rescue some of those qualities of resistance, excellence and integrity that were so much a part of our past and so useful to us. ("Rediscovering Black History" 14)

Morrison's fictive circles of sorrow invite readers to become conscious of the terrain of their lives, to re-cognize the terrain as not simply individual or personal, but as thoroughly social, traversed by the claims of the past, occupied by conflicting ideologies of identity (class, race, gender, nationhood) that give rise to the boundaries of the self. (Grewal 14).

It is not nostalgia but piety that informs Morrison's return to the past. Such a return is not a flight from the present but an acknowledgement of the secret agreement between past generations and the present one, the claim of the past to deliverance in and by the present (Grewal 78).

Not only Morrison's piety, but also Faulkner's and Warren's, is an attempt to disclose this secret, to reveal the second story in the house(s) of American fiction. Morrison's objectives in her narratives are to re-vision the spaces and silences in these canonical white male authored narratives and to find a space and a language in which to disclose the secret *without* falling helplessly into silence and destroying the house.

"In Morrison's art we witness the lyric gesture and force of a minor literature doing the work of decolonization, demystification and social redress within the dominant

language" (Grewal 18). Morrison's first two novels focus on "the tension that exists between the black and white universes, worlds cut off and separated from one another. *Song of Solomon* is different because it merges these two universes. Mainstream traditions are re-examined, transformed" (Rigney 74).

Regarding the influence of other great (mostly male) American writers, Morrison has said that her work is separate from theirs. It seems to me, though, that hers is the necessary complement of the works of writers like Faulkner and Warren, for whom the character most radically other, and therefore difficult to render and virtually impossible to give voice to, was the black woman. Morrison "creates a world that by its very being questions the foundations of their worlds" (Rigney 139). But her work is more than a mere response. The work of Morrison's fiction entails not only the representation of a knowledge excised from dominant understanding but also healing from a history that has visited trauma upon its subjects (Grewal 15).

In the end, Rice notes, "[h]ers is the business of making us aware of an unfinished world, both inside of us and outside of us" (Rice 142), a house with many more windows than even James and the other canonical male authors that came after him could have imagined.

Introduction

¹ Richard Gray's book *The Literature of Memory* provides an excellent historical analysis of the evolution of the Southern literary tradition, the Southern Renaissance, Nashville Agrarians and the work of other Southern writers of place and memory, focusing on Glasgow, Faulkner, Gordon, Welty, Elizabeth Maddox Roberts and a number of post World War II Southern writers as well.

² William T. Ruzicka, *Faulkner's Fictive Architecture: The Meaning of Place in the Yoknapatawpha Novels*. (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987) p. 46. The underlying image that spawned my arguments in this paper is the idea of Usher's house being reflected in and then sinking into the tarn, rising again 97 years later in *Absalom, Absalom!* Also interesting in terms of silence and otherness is the fact that the swamp, in Faulkner is a place of pre-language, a "primordial" space of lack. Ruzicka argues many interesting points about the actual raising of the house, and Philip Weinstein, in "Precarious Sanctuaries: Protection and Exposure in Faulkner's Fiction," argues convincingly that characters in Faulkner are responding to the chaos and ontological poverty of the swamp, each with designs of his or her own.

³ Though many critics argue that the setting for this story is a kind of "no-man's land," outside of time and space, I am more convinced by arguments such as those made by Beverly Voloshin and Leila May that the story indeed has (and critiques) a cultural context. May argues specifically for the context of the Victorian ideal of family, but nonetheless, her argument sets the tale within a space and time. Building on that, and details of autobiographical criticism by Thomas Woodson and Hervey Allen, who asserts that Poe probably saw the prototype for the House "in some old crumbling and crack-walled mansion surrounded by its swamps and gloomy woods, its cypress-stained tarns and its snake-haunted Indian moat," while assigned to Fort Moultrie in South Carolina. The late James Dickey claimed that the House was in nearby Georgetown, SC, (coincidentally near Dickey's own home), and indeed the setting for Usher seems very similar to the actual geographical site of Sutpen's Hundred (see Appendix). Poe's family roots were Southern, his childhood was spent in Virginia, and he worked as editor for the Southern Literary Messenger for several years—he would have been familiar with the South as setting and the themes of Southern writing, all of which find their way into the House of Usher.

⁴ The concept of "the Other" and otherness are discussed in philosophical works from Hegel to Sartre, articulated by Saussure and Lacan as a way of approaching the subject through concern with both others and the Other of the Symbolic system itself. Self (same) (one)/Other is the primary division in the Symbolic system, though Western culture takes as primary the masculine/feminine split. So, although the Other is often feminine, it can also be simply feminized by our insistence on the primacy of sexual division, and the fact that both Other and feminine are anchored on the same side of the binary slash, causing the two terms to seem interchangeable.

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, introduction to *The Second Sex*, excerpted in *Philosophy of Woman*, ed. Mary Briody Mahowald (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983) pp. 80-100.

⁶ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. Translated by H.M. Parshley. (New York: Knopf, 1968) xxix. For the purposes of my argument, the Other can easily be referred to generally as a "she," since gender is a construct in much more widespread use than Self/Other constructions, and ultimately they are part of the same Symbolic system.

⁷ It is widely accepted in Faulkner criticism (see particularly Malcolm Cowley's "Poe in Mississippi") that Sutpen's story is an allegory of the South, (and internally, both Rosa and Quentin make comments that clearly illustrate their belief that Sutpen represents the South, that he is, in fact, "why we lost the war,") though some critics such as James Snead and Carolyn Porter see Sutpen as an American figure more than a regional one. Porter, for example, argues in "The Significance of Thomas Sutpen" that he acts as a "register of American history," in terms of being a capitalist entrepreneur, a paternalist authority figure and man who clearly believed in Manifest Destiny. She argues that his is the "fate implicit in the American dream," while I argue that it is the fate implicit in the lived and living myth of the Cavalier South—but in the final analysis, it's all one dream—a patriarchal dream of dominance and pretty, silent objects lined up against the walls of the house that the (paternalistic) (Southern) (American) man built. She does concede, though, that Sutpen's story contains elements uniquely Southern as well.

⁸ Beginning with the dying race of Ushers, Southern plantation houses are often peopled with the last living members of the family who built them. In Faulkner, we have the Sartoris', Compsons and Sutpens, as well as a host of other families that, unfortunately, cannot be discussed in this work. In Warren, the Stantons, Ellises, and Burdens of *All the Kings Men* are all families that have dwindled from dynastic proportions to a single member. The Spottwoods of *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, and the Fiddlers and Tollivers of *Flood* are similarly doomed. Morrison's *Sweet Home* has been reduced (or enlarged) to a *rememory* and Circe of *Song of Solomon*, like Clytie of *Absalom, Absalom!* is left to oversee the destruction of the Butler home.

⁹ I am using this term as Adrienne Rich defined it in "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction..."

¹⁰ Leila May makes the argument that Poe uses Roderick and Madeline to express the perspective that the brother-sister bond, a bond of "difference and sameness", is "conceived in the same contradictory fashion as the [19th century] family...both an ideological justification of the patriarchal system and a potential subversion of those same structures" (390) and that the collapse of the House of Usher is due to the "unraveling of distinctions between male/female...inside/outside" etc. Further, she argues that Madeline, and through her both the House and the house of Usher, are destroyed by the "domestic ideology" of the time, the same ideology at work in the world of *Absalom, Absalom!*

¹¹ Heidegger writes in "Poetry, Language and Thought:" "Only when we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build...the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and heaven, divinities and mortals enter in simple oneness into things, orders the house." As such, authentic dwelling shapes both space and time, giving meaning to an otherwise chaotic and meaningless world, giving form to the "Nothing" out of which Sutpen drags his plantation. This is, then, the only true way in which a space acts as *place*, imbued with spirit and meaning, and only place can act as

sanctuary. Sutpen lives in a space not yet transformed into place, and as such, can find no sanctuary in his own home. Indeed, as Quentin says, he doesn't even get to haunt the house after his death; he haunts only the voice of Rosa Coldfield.

¹² Lucinda MacKethan's book *Daughters of Time: Creating Woman's Voice in Southern Story*, gives a full accounting of this assertion. Especially useful in understanding the impact of patriarchal values on the development of the South is Chapter One, "Naming the Father: The Stories of Catherine Hammond and Harriet Jacobs."

¹³ For our purposes here, the system involves, but is not limited to: Self/Other, masculine/feminine, subject/object, active/passive, mind/body, public/private, white/black, civilized/natural (wild), order/chaos, North/South, conqueror/conquered, hero/villain, spoken/silent.

¹⁴ James Snead in *Figures of Division* speaks of how "male and female roles interweave without warning," as do black and white merge in this text. Even Sutpen is "twinned" with the blacks of the text, constantly spoken of in terms of his "dark" aspects and origins. His convincing argument ends with the idea that the enforced separations and subsequent suppressions of the black Other (though he doesn't discuss "other-ness as such) cause the ruptures and collapse of structures in the text as the repressed returns. Philip Weinstein argues just as persuasively for women as the "site of disturbance within the patriarchal leanings of Faulkner's text," in the Gender chapter of *Faulkner's Subject*. I use the term androgynous to speak about characters who straddle the binary in any way. It has already been established that patriarchal cultures see the sexual division as primary in the system of oppositions, so I am using it as primary in the language of this paper, as well. Androgyny, then, signifies characters who blur, cross or otherwise obscure the lines of division in the Symbolic order.

¹⁵ Though critics have wrangled over the reliability of Usher's narrator, the most notable instance being the long critical debate between Patrick Quinn and G.R. Thompson, I am most convinced by Cynthia Jordan's argument in *Second Stories*. She argues that the narrator represents "misogynist strategies of textual control" from which Usher must free himself by alternative mediums of expression such as painting and poetics. In this way, Roderick acts to bring Madeline back "from the tomb to the text" and is a conduit, based on this endeavor and his obvious androgyny, for retrieving the silenced "second story" of the tale. Moreover, we have only the narrator's word that Madeline said nothing, only shrieked. She suggests that he was incapable of hearing Madeline because of his misogynist approach to her, and his final act as narrator, as he flees the scene of the returned feminine, is to consign them all, house and merged siblings, to the "silence" of the tarn. Faulkner's narrators similarly engage in one-sided narrative renderings, especially Mr. Compson who is himself a representative of the patriarchal ordering system and the Southern man.

¹⁶ Diane Long Hoeveler, focusing largely on the male-oriented texts of Usher's library, particularly the *Viviliae Mortuorum*, and the expression of the "male's confrontation with the female as Cultural Other" makes an interesting case for Madeline as an abjection of Roderick, who is posited as the Abject Hero. For a full discussion of this, see "The Hidden God and the Abjected Woman in 'The Fall of the House of Usher.'"

¹⁷ Warren's heroes are invariably individuals who come to a recognition of the importance of community and self-unification AND who take action based on those realizations. Brad Tolliver,

by this definition, clearly cannot be the hero of the text, though both Maggie and Lettice certainly qualify.

¹⁸ Marilyn Chandler discusses the significance of the description of Madeline's "tomb" in *Dwelling in the Text*: "to make it a place of torture and imprisonment, and then a storage space for high explosives resonates with sinister implications about the magnitude of her power to threaten" (Chandler 59) (Chandler says Roderick here, but I say, following up on May's argument, that it is the narrator who is threatened).

Chapter One

¹ It is widely accepted in Faulkner criticism (see particularly Malcolm Cowley's "Poe in Mississippi") that Sutpen's story is an allegory of the South, (and internally, both Rosa and Quentin make comments that clearly illustrate their belief that Sutpen represents the South, that he is "why we lost the war," in fact) though some critics such as James Snead and Carolyn Porter see Sutpen as an American figure more than a regional one. Porter, for example, argues in "The Significance of Thomas Sutpen" that he acts as a "register of American history," in terms of being a capitalist entrepreneur, a paternalist authority figure and man who clearly believed in Manifest Destiny. She argues that his is the "fate implicit in the American dream," while I argue that it is the fate implicit in the lived and living myth of the Cavalier South—but in the final analysis, it's all one dream—a patriarchal dream of dominance and pretty, silent objects lined up against the walls of the house that the (paternalistic) (Southern) (American) man built. She does concede, though, that Sutpen's story contains elements uniquely Southern as well.

² Heidegger quoted in Babette E. Babich's "Questioning Heidegger's Silence: A Postmodern Topology." 83-87.

³ Critics posit many reasons for the narrative structure of *Absalom, Absalom!* Of the more convincing, there is Conrad Aiken's argument that Faulkner is after a feeling of motion, continuum and enigma; James Snead's book *Figures of Division*, like Philip Weinstein's *Faulkner's Subject*, reveal the extent to which division and merger appear as part of both theme and structure; and other critics devote themselves to uncovering the mystery of what we know, how we know and who else (in the text) knows it in the novel. This last is a reference to Brooks' "What we Know of Thomas Sutpen and his Children."

⁴ See Tonya Fulsom's "Eulalia Bon's Untold Story," for example.

⁵ Heidegger writes in "Poetry, Language and Thought:" "Only when we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build...the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and heaven, divinities and mortals enter in simple oneness into things, orders the house." As such, authentic dwelling shapes both space and time, giving meaning to an otherwise chaotic and meaningless world, giving form to the "Nothing" out of which Sutpen drags his plantation. This is, then, the only true way in which a space acts as *place*, imbued with spirit and meaning, and only place can act as sanctuary. Sutpen lives in a space not yet transformed into place, and as such, can find no sanctuary in his own home. Indeed, as Quentin says, he doesn't even get to haunt the house after his death; he haunts only the voice of Rosa Coldfield.

⁶ For our purposes here, the system involves, but is not limited to: Self/Other, masculine/feminine, subject/object, active/passive, mind/body, public/private, white/black, civilized/natural (wild), order/chaos, North/South, conqueror/conquered, hero/villain.

⁷ James Snead in *Figures of Division* speaks of how "male and female roles interweave without warning," as do black and white merge in this text. Even Sutpen is "twinned" with the blacks of the text, constantly spoken of in terms of his "dark" aspects and origins. His convincing argument ends with the idea that the enforced separations and subsequent suppressions of the black Other (though he doesn't discuss "other-ness as such) cause the ruptures and collapse of structures in the text as the repressed returns. Philip Weinstein argues just as persuasively for women as the "site of disturbance within the patriarchal leanings of Faulkner's text," in the Gender chapter of *Faulkner's Subject*. I use the term androgynous to speak about characters who straddle the binary in any way. It has already been established that patriarchal cultures see the sexual division as primary in the system of oppositions, so I am using it as primary in the language of this paper, as well. Androgyny, then, signifies characters who blur, cross or otherwise obscure the lines of division in the Symbolic order.

⁸ Díaz-Diocaretz offers a fascinating and compelling discussion of themes and metaphors in Faulkner's work relative to the concept of the *hen-house* which she defines as "the hypothetical place in Faulkner's discourse where he, as creator and generator of textural structures, has control over the writing and the meaning of "woman" and "women" ...as characters, symbols, images or metaphors" (240)

⁹ Philip Weinstein, *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) p. 24

¹⁰ This is a reference not only to the way I think about the novel, but to an article by Cleanth Brooks entitled, "What we Know about Thomas Sutpen and his Children," wherein he delineates clearly who knew what, what (f)actually happened and what was pure conjecture. Whole stories in the text are, of course, just that; Eulalia Bon's story, for example is purely a figment of Shreve and Quentin's merged imagination. Tonya Fulsom's "Eulalia Bon's Untold Story" is one of the only articles I've seen that even approaches the story of this abandoned other as being something different than the one given in the narrative. Brooks lists 39 major and minor "events" in the novel that never actually happened, and many of them concern the "others" of the story, particularly Judith and Bon, whose stories are suppressed and silenced. The scenes which primarily involve them, and in which they could have voiced their stories, significantly, I think, take place in the private spaces of the second story—where Ellen, Judith, Bon, Bon's son, Clytie/Raby and Henry Sutpen all die. For a discussion of private/public space distinctions in the home, see Ruzicka's introductory chapter in *Faulkner's Fictive Architecture*, and Chandler's *Dwelling in the Text*.

¹¹ I think it pertinent to mention here that in "Evangeline" the actions and the howling of Jim Bond are produced by Henry Sutpen's dog, and not by a human being at all. The conflation of the dog and the last of the Sutpen "dynasty" is a noteworthy one. Unlike Jim Bond, though, as the house seemed to "collapse, to fold in upon itself, melting..." the dog comes around the house, "not howling now...and sprang into the roaring dissolution of the house without a sound, without a cry." Somehow, this seems a kinder fate than the one dealt Jim Bond, and a significant difference, indicating, perhaps, that the system that produced Jim Bond may never fully

disappear. The Jim Bonds will be left to take over the Western Hemisphere, Shreve believes, a visible sign, in both his idiocy and his merged racial identity, of the tragic flaw in the ideological foundation of the South and all such structures built on division.

¹² Novak, 201.

¹³ Even very minor characters who represent otherness, like Charles Bon's son, Charles Etienne De Saint Velery Bon, dies in the upstairs bedroom, as do Ellen, Judith, Charles, (though he may have been dead before they brought him into the house--as with many significant facts, this could only be known if one of the textual others, Judith, Clytie or Charles himself, was positioned as narrator rather than consistently as narrated object), and later (simultaneously) Henry and Clytie. Curiously, Sutpen is the only one of his clan to die utterly outside the house he built to be both sanctuary and incubator for his "design," his dynasty.

¹⁴ This is a reference to Robert Mugeraur's statement near the end of "Architecture as Properly Useful Opening." The context from which this sentence was rendered is as follows, "...patient listening...is a preliminary opening in that it is an opening to something other than one's self. Here is the putting of the self or ego aside...to attend to the spirit of the place" (217).

¹⁵ Clytie and Rosa twice nearly come to blows in the downstairs hall at the foot of the stairs. In dispute is always the right of the one to govern or enter the territory of the upstairs. Sutpen sets up his tombstone there as if to mark his territory, and remind those who would cross the boundary into the upstairs space of otherness of whose House/house it really is. The hall is the most public of spaces, giving access from the outside world and providing access to all the other rooms in the public parts of the house, as well as access to the stairs which lead to the private space of the second story.

¹⁶ The doubling of Quentin and Rosa is most apparent in their relation to the past, their envisioning of an heroic Old South, the values of which need to be upheld even into the present. Quentin's "calling out" of Dalton Ames and insistence on the chastity of his sister in *The Sound and the Fury* are examples of the farcical way the past manifests in the present, as is Rosa's poetry and "eternal black" clothes. Ultimately, both are destroyed by the attachment to their illusions, and inability to live in the present. And Sutpen's story is what destroys Quentin, as I have argued elsewhere, just as it destroys Rosa by its end. Rosa has nothing to live for once all the Sutpens and their house are gone, those symbols of an "old ghost time" in which she, and Quentin, live. Quentin likewise perishes when his own illusions, all based in the myth of the Cavalier South, collapse.

¹⁷ Weinstein notes that when speaking of the house, many of the narrators seem to see it as standing in contradiction to Sutpen.

¹⁸ Murray Silverstein's "The First Roof: Interpreting Spatial Pattern" explains in great detail the archetypes involved in phenomenological approaches to architecture, including the Great Mother archetype and its relation to the First Roof archetype. The First Roof archetype conceives of a dwelling as a vessel, connected to the idea of the feminine body as vessel in its womb function. The First Roof archetype, then, reflects the womb function of the dwelling place.

¹⁹ Marilyn Chandler, *Dwelling in the Text*, p.336.

²⁰ Hershel Parker, in "What Quentin Saw "Out There," argues that the way Quentin comes to know the truth about Sutpen and Bon is through this recognition, which comes before he sees Henry and could learn this through him. He argues that Quentin reconstructs Bon's racial heritage when he sees Jim Bon's "saddle-colored" Sutpen face in the hall with Clytie's "coffee-colored," also Sutpen, face.

²¹ Much of the rhetoric of Mr. Compson's narration, and some of Rosa's, employs battle imagery. See Andrea Dimino "Fathers and Strangers: From Patriarchy to Counterfamily in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" for a fuller discussion of this motif.

²² Throughout the text, and especially in Rosa's Chapter V, the house is seen as both a speaker and a space of not-speaking. Rosa sees Judith and Clytie speak, but it is the voice of the house she hears, and she records throughout Chapter V instances of communication within the house taking place "not aloud, not with words," as though what is communicated in the space of the Other can be communicated without language. This later extends into Quentin's narration of the destruction of the house and how he knows things when he is inside that he didn't know before and even in the house is not told "in so many words."

Chapter Two

¹ For our purposes here, the system involves, but is not limited to: Self/Other, outside/inside, masculine/feminine, subject/object, public/private, civilized/natural (wild), speaking/silent.

² See Marilyn Chandler, Cynthia Jordan, Leila May and Ellen Eve Frank's respective works, referenced in the bibliography of this study for more complete arguments to this point.

³ Gaston Bachelard in fact, in *The Poetics of Space*, takes the latter as the primary "dialectic of division;" I don't feel the need to rank one of these binarisms over the other. They seem to me just different ways of saying the same thing, one being an internal division the other being that very division represented in the physical, social, historical world.

⁴ In the Fisher interview, published in *Fout Quarters*, XXI (May 1972), and quoted extensively in Casper's *The Blood-Marriage of Earth and Sky*, Warren comments on the process of writing, saying that the author works not "deductively from a highly articulated image, a careful scheme of values; { [rather] he is trying to find the values, find the ideas, by a process of trial and error."

⁵ Heidegger discusses the idea of the authentic self. See Chapter One of this work for a discussion of the authentic self relative to the Southern writers.

⁶ See Carol Christ, *Beyond Androgyny* for a full discussion of the difference between cultural value systems hinged on dualisms and the Western value system of binary oppositions. This is also discussed in the Introduction to this study, though obviously in less detail than Christ's full text work.

⁷ Victor Strandberg discusses Warren's philosophies of the divided self, and the self in the world in several of his works, referenced in the bibliography. Guttenberg's *Web of Being: The Novels of Robert Penn Warren*, Leonard Casper's *The Blood Marriage of Earth and Sky*, Bedford Clark's works on Warren as an American idealist and James Justus' biography of Warren.

⁸ It is interesting to note that the old houses of Faulkner and Warren are destroyed, whereas in Morrison, as we'll see in the next chapter, the divisive spirit can be destroyed without destroying the house it had been haunting. The houses in *Absalom, Absalom!* and both Warren texts under examination here are Southern houses, built by and identified with the patriarchs who built them, while the house at 124 Bluestone is a female space, and even its *genius loci* is a feminine one. This partially accounts for the difference. Chapter Three contains a more in depth analysis.

⁹ As many critics have noted, this text is replete with fathers and surrogate fathers, of which Goldfarb is a primary one. Not only does he act as a father-figure in terms of spending time with Brad, teaching him chess and not only that, but teaching him what it was to "be a man" because he would "speak to you as though you were a man, and later he played chess with you and did not let you win" (*Flood* 16), he is also a lover of books, unlike Brad's biological father Lank, who can only find use for them as spills for the fire. And, as Randy Runyon points out in his excellent book, *The Taciturn Text: The Fiction of Robert Penn Warren*, of those in town, only Brad can identify the languages in which the texts Goldfarb keeps are written. Although *I'm Telling You Now* ends with the narrator returning to say good bye to Abie/Izzie, in truth, Brad didn't even bid the old man farewell when he left for college, and never returned to say it, either. He also failed to say good-bye to Lank Tolliver, to Telford Lott and even leaves old Frog-Eye, part Brad's contemporary, part Lank's, asleep in the swamp without a word of farewell. For more in depth analysis of the paternal figures in Warren, please see Runyon's book, referenced earlier, and Barnett Guttenberg's *Web of Being: The Novels of Robert Penn Warren*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1975. Leonard Casper's *The Blood Marriage of Earth and Sky* also contains references to the paternal figures and their relationship to texts.

¹⁰ Though Maggie's monologue takes place over the course of a month, it is nevertheless a sustained monologue and the only speech of consequence given her.

¹¹ This term is taken from Timothy Walsh in his influential book, *The Dark Matter of Words*. A structured absence is one that is made evident by the "framing" of it, by pointing out that something is missing. An impacted structured absence is one framed by too many possibilities, such that nothing can be certain.

¹² It should be noted that in Yasha's references to this Stendahl quote, he speaks of *le silence du bonheur* sometimes as an end and sometimes as a means to an end. For example, he tells Brad that the beautiful thing (the truth of Brad's story) will come *dans le silence du bonheur* but he also refers to it as a state in which one might abide, something to strive for. In studying the phenomenology of silence, one comes to realize that there are as many silences as there are languages, but each type conveys meaning, so Yasha's reference to silence in both of these modes should not be considered contradictory.

¹³ See the full version of this 1842 poem, and its rather interesting first version (1832).

¹⁴ Lucy Ferriss constructs a fascinating and viable argument that the extensive flashbacks contained in the text and not belonging to Maggie might actually *be* Brad's text, rather than externally focalized narrative. See *Sleeping with the Boss: Female Subjectivity and Narrative Pattern in Robert Penn Warren*, pp. 98-102.

¹⁵ As Lucy Ferriss points out, Brad is an autobiographically inclined writer who, for much of the text, is thinking about or writing an autobiographical treatment for the movie script. When he is

clearly constructing himself, that is, during the points in the flashbacks where he is clearly commenting on that younger self, he refers to that character as Bradwell Tolliver. In fact, an interesting avenue of study might be to trace Brad's naming of himself relative to Ferriss' idea that much of the text is actually the text Brad is writing. But what I find interesting about this naming is that Bradwell Tolliver is specifically and exclusively what Lettice Poindexter calls him in the early days of their relationship. That he would choose this name for the character of himself is telling, and indicates the extent to which his love for her acts, finally, as the impetus of his redemption.

¹⁶ As I point out in Chapter One, voice does not necessarily require language to be an authentic saying, and so my inclusion of Faulkner here is dependant on the idea that silence speaks.

¹⁷ Warren has been charged with creating "a gallery of bitches," by Leslie Fiedler and many of his critics seem to agree. Not much has been written in a favorable vein on Warren's women except by recent feminist scholar Lucy Ferriss. Most often, when he does venture into a female subjectivity it is overlooked (as with Maggie and Lettice) or reviled. Criticism of *Band of Angels*, for example, seems to center almost completely on whether or not Manty Starr is a reliable or even a likable narrator and she is held to standards that Warren's male narrators like Jack Burden, Brad Tolliver and Jed Tewksbury are never expected to conform to (see Ferriss' discussion in *Sleeping with the Boss*). Overall, this attempt at female narration was regarded as a total failure, and something Warren did not attempt again.

¹⁸ And there aren't many. In fact, many books of criticism that purport to be about Warren's work are really only about the early works and often spend considerably more time on *All the King's Men* than any of the other novels put together. Harold Bloom's *Modern Critical Views: Robert Penn Warren*, fails to include even a passing mention of this novel. It is my opinion that this concentration on *All the King's Men*, which includes women only as plot devices, as Lucy Ferriss points out in *Sleeping with the Boss*, is part of the reason that feminist criticism, even gynocritics, have passed on Warren's work. However, *Meet Me in the Green Glen* contains a multitude of possibilities for feminist readings.

¹⁹ From the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Third Edition.

²⁰ The House of Usher is, of course, also destroyed by water, and Poe's short story, like Warren's novel, has at its center the violent silencing of a woman within the house--Madeline's absence through death, like Cassie's absence through being committed, causes the destruction of the house. The house, as representative of patriarchal ideology stands only so long as the woman remains for it to stand against.

²¹ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. Translated by H.M. Parshley. (New York: Knopf, 1968) xxix. For the purposes of my argument, the Other can easily be referred to generally as a "she," since gender is a construct in much more widespread use than Self/Other constructions, and ultimately they are part of the same Symbolic system.

Chapter Three

¹For a full argument on this subject, see Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems' *Toni Morrison*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990.

²Not only is 124 victimized by the Fugitive Slave Act and thus not really free, Beloved herself enacts a slavemaster's role in the house, as will be discussed in length later in this chapter.

³ Contributors to the SUNY series *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology*, especially David Seamon, Murray Silverstein and Erich Newman elaborate quite poetically on the subject of the archetype of the house and its relationship to both the human body and the human imagination. See *Dwelling, Seeing, Designing: Toward a Phenomenological Ecology*. Ed. by David Seamon. SUNY Press: New York, 1993.

⁴ Discussion of spatial images that typically function as figures of speech but are here functioning as actions further illuminates the sense in which language use reinforces the sense of rememory and the materialization of the abstract in the concrete. See Jean Wyatt's "Giving Body to the Word..." for more on this.

⁵ A full discussion of Bodwin and the idea of domain as a privilege of white males in the society as a direct opposition to the idea of house as *hus* (shelter) can be found in Lori Askeland's "Remodeling the Model Home in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved*."

⁶ The white male can lay claim to the bodies of both blacks and women. During this time period, women black or white, are seen as commodities, owned objects--not truly independent or even in control of their environment either, as we see with Mrs. Garner upon the death of her husband.

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